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TOWARD
SODOM

TOWARD SODOM

by

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Author of "*The Trail of the Conestoga*"



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TO MY "IN-QUAINTANCES,"—
GOD BLESS THEM!
HOW ARID LIFE WOULD BE
WITHOUT THEM!

The author wishes to acknowledge the use
of several stories related by the late
Hon. James Young in his *Early
History of Galt.*

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CHAPTER I

Greenbush Days

IT was evening at Greenbush, in the year 1850, as lovely a long Canadian evening as ever dropped like a benediction from heaven at the close of a hot summer's day. All was quiet, not even a stir in the tallest tree-top. Out of the everywhere came the dark shadows of the approaching night, and stealthily, magically, they crept over the land like grim, uncanny spectres from the spirit world.

The spell of evening had fallen, too, over the Horst homestead, nestling, as it did, in the very heart of the forest primeval. The horses had been stabled; the noisy chickens had long since gone to roost. No clatter in the kitchen now. In silence the family awaited the coming of the night.

The Horsts enjoyed, even among the industrious people with whom they journeyed through life, an enviable reputation for thrift. Little use for his satanic majesty to look there for prospective mischief-makers. Idleness was in their eyes a sin and a disgrace; work, the ultimate aim of life; and heaven, the final destiny of man.

Sarah, the mother, was the high-priestess who by

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precept and example kept the family plodding along in the straight and narrow way. She had had a hard day in the kitchen, and her Mennonite garb was impervious to any chance breeze that might blow. And now that evening had come, the only rest she allowed herself was a variation of labour. Winter would be around again before she knew it, and her supply of woollens was low. So she laid her hand to the spindle, and her hands held the distaff. Before her large spinning-wheel she paced, drawing out the wool into strands of yarn. No idolatrous woman of the orient ever wrestled so before her household god.

The clock on the wall struck the hour.

"Nine o'clock and him not here yet!" exclaimed the industrious woman. "Look once at the door, Lydia. Your legs are younger than mine. See if he don't come yet."

Lydia did not need a second injunction to drop the mat she was hooking. For hours she had longed to be out enjoying the cool of the evening.

"Ain't he comin'?" Sarah was impatient. "Make shut again, quick, so the bugs don't come in."

Reluctantly obedient, Lydia closed the door and returned to her work.

Sarah put her wheel aside and began to wind the yarn. "Your pop makes always so slow," she went on to say. "It's in the Horsts, slowness. When I want him bad it seems like he never comes. A man can be awful provokin'."

This discourse added nothing to Lydia's previous

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store of knowledge, so she made no reply. She dropped her work wearily and went to look out of the window.

"You're blockin' the light," Sarah said to her, reproachfully. "Go and set down once. Till it's time to stop work, I'll tell you. How hard I have to learn you to be a good housekeeper yet."

"Can I make a light, then?"

The mother assented, but not willingly. A candle saved was a penny earned, and Lydia had such good eyes.

The girl lit the taper and went on hooking.

Silence again.

Presently a stir was heard at the outside door. Manassah, presumably, returning from the chores, but he did not come in.

"Are you done already?" called Sarah.

No reply.

"Ain't you there, Manassah?" The voice was full of imperious impatience.

"Yes."

"What doin'?"

"Thinking."

"Thinkin'," scoffed his mother. "I do my thinkin' along with my workin'. So would you, if you was smart enough. Run out at the lane and look once if your pop's comin'."

Manassah threw his hat indifferently upon his head and sauntered off.

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"The time that boy wastes with his thinkin' would clear the swamp," declared Sarah.

"But Mannie can't work all the time." This somewhat impertinent remark emanated from Esther, the younger daughter, whose duty it was to sort the rags for her sister's hooking.

"You're as bad as Manassah with your thinkin'," retorted Sarah. "But you think about your curly hair and wish you had a pretty face. All such wain thoughts you have. But Manassah he thinks about ideas. I often wonder what he does think anyway."

"I know," piped up Cyrus, the baby of the family, the pride and joy of his mother's heart. He was playing with a ball of yarn on the floor and getting it hopelessly tangled, yet without reproof.

"What does my Cyrus-boy know?"

Young Cyrus bristled with importance. "He thinks a lot about Hannah Stauffer," was the information he was pleased to impart. There was evidently a great deal more he could tell, if he would.

"Hannah Stauffer!" cried Sarah in alarm. "How do you know that?"

"He talks about her in the night." Another delectable lump from the great store-house of interesting knowledge.

"In his sleep?" quizzed Sarah.

Cyrus nodded. "I heard him once."

"And why didn't you make me acquainted to that mischief?" Her voice was full of gentle reproach.

Cyrus was only ten years old, but an adept in the

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art of finding a plausible excuse for the most unforeseen exigency. He was ready with one now. "Mannie wouldn't leave me," he said.

"He wouldn't leave you? He didn't do you nothin', did he?"

"No."

"Well, what then?"

"He— He—"

"Huh?"

"He said if I wouldn't tell, he would leave me have his knife."

"He didn't go and forget to give it to you, did he?"

Cyrus drew a rusty-bladed weapon from his pocket, together with a twig of slippery elm, and yards and yards of string. He was going to make a whistle, he said. Manassah had told him how. He stuck one end of the wood into his mouth and strutted about the room, tooting vociferously.

All the indignation in Esther's youthful bosom blazed forth at that. "I'm going to tell Mannie," she cried. "He'll take his knife back." She pointed a scornful finger at whichever corner of the room Cyrus happened to be in while he was performing his triumphal march.

"Tattle-tale!" hissed Cyrus.

"Tattle-tale yourself!" retorted Esther. "You're a bigger one than me."

"Esther, you shut up," commanded the mother.

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"You leave Cyrus be. He did right to tell. Now I know it, I can step on it."

The noise and tumult of the moment was accentuated by the return of Manassah with the announcement that his father was in sight. Sarah at once became excited. She shoved her spinning-wheel into its corner, bade Lydia lay aside her work, and began to bustle unnecessarily about Ephraim, whose attention was riveted on a huge book.

"What's the matter?" said the boy, when his mother had poked him for the third time.

"He's comin' home, your pop is."

"Did you think he would run away?" He meant no impertinence, but it seemed the logical conclusion.

"This time it's different," replied Sarah. "He's got the news to-night. I can't wait hardly till I hear it myself."

"News!" scoffed Ephraim. "News is what happened long ago. It don't now." He drew his chair closer to the sputtering candle, and stuck his nose into the next page of his precious book.

"Pop's here," cried Cyrus. "What did he fetch me, I wonder."

"A strap, if he knows what is good for you," remarked Manassah, drily.

Cyrus made a face at Esther. "Tattle-tale!" he flung contemptuously over his shoulder.

There was something wrong with Noah Horst. He sat slouching in the corner of his "dach-weggli," a picture of abject dejection. The reins hung loosely

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over the dash-board, and the bay mare ambled along at her own sweet will.

"You ain't sick, Nooi?" cried Sarah, in alarm.

"You ain't sick, pop?" echoed Cyrus. It was not his father's health that caused him concern, but the immediate prospect of a vague something he might have in his pocket.

Noah roused himself. "No," he said, "I ain't sick, at least not body-sick."

"You look like you was at a funeral," said Sarah, somewhat relieved. "Can't you make a little quicker?"

He couldn't, apparently. He tried to rise, but he fell back again into the seat.

"Nooi!" exclaimed Sarah. "You're keepin' me in the dark. Tell me what you did all in Ebytown."

Noah could not answer. He made another futile attempt to rise.

"Did you buy it? Tell me that once."

"Yes, I bought it."

"Then why must I dig it out of you so?" demanded the woman in a tone calculated to match the enormity of her husband's offence. "Why don't you stand up like a man and say so?"

Sarah was by no means as aggravated as her tone would seem to indicate. Her face radiated joy. And why shouldn't it, indeed, for Noah had just given her the assurance that the fondest dream of her heart would soon be realized. No more of this hum-drum existence. Thanks to her foresight and perseverance, a new day was about to dawn for the Horsts, a day of

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rare opportunity and advancement. If Noah couldn't see as far as his nose, she could.

"How much must you pay, Nooi?" she asked, endeavouring to conceal the exuberance of her joy. "You didn't tell me that yet."

Noah picked up the reins and handed them to his son. "Here, Manassah, she's all sweated. Rub her down good."

"Ezra can do your chores," interposed Sarah. With one hand she pushed Manassah imperiously back, with the other she thrust the cringing Ezra compellingly forward. No matter how urgent the business at hand, she always found time to discriminate between her own son and the young waif of a man who, as an infant in arms, had been thrown into the bargain, so to speak, when she married Noah. "It ain't none of Ezra's business, is't, what you did all with my money? He don't have to hear."

Noah heaved a deep-brought sigh. It was only too true. The money was Sarah's. All he had in the world was Sarah's, all except what Sarah did not want—Ezra and the Greenbush farm. Yet these were what Noah loved more than all the world beside. They were Rachael's, his and Rachael's. For twenty years and more the wife of his youth had been sleeping in her lonely grave in the clearing on the hill, but in spirit she was always at his side. Every thought of her stirred his heart with tenderest emotion. She had been so gentle, so loving, so contented.

"Nooi Horst!" shrieked the gentle Rachael's suc-

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cessor. "You're thinkin' about her again. No wonder you're sick. Stop it, I say. Come in the kitchen once, and tell me all what I want to know." She turned to the unoffending Ezra. "What for must you stand so, and gopp? It ain't nothin' for your ears."

"Pop's sot yet," Manassah ventured to remind his mother.

"It seems we must help him to get out yet," replied Sarah. "I thought he was chust makin' like he can't."

There was no pretence about Noah's indisposition: it became increasingly evident. It seemed as though he had aged years in a single day. Never had his hair looked so gray, nor his face so haggard. He could not walk without his cane.

Sarah's conscience pricked her. Was he hungry, perhaps? Should she make him a dose of tansy tea?

"I'm not body-sick."

"What did you eat for supper?"

"Nothin'. I couldn't," said Noah. "My insides was all upside down."

Sarah meditated a moment. "We had pork and beans," she said, "and sauer-kraut and schnitz-pie. Do you feel for a little of that?"

"If I could have some spreadings chust—," ventured Noah, dropping into the chair that Lydia had pulled up for him to the table.

Sarah bustled to the corner-cupboard and got out the apple-butter jar. She spread a thick coating of the brown delicacy over a huge slab of buttered bread and brought it to the hungry man. "Esther," she called,

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"you can run once in the cellar and fetch some lebkuche along up. No, you don't need no candle. A big girl like you ain't afraid of the dark."

But whether I can find the lebkuche—"

"You can feel," decided her mother. "I set a shilling crock for the mice on the shelf at supper-time already. Watch out you don't knock it down. And, Lydy, you can fetch the milk from the spring-house—the five-quart pail that has the rag in the hole at the bottom. Say, Esther,"—she called this down the cellar steps—"fetch the summer sausage along up, too, the little piece. He might chust as well have it as the mice."

When the improvised supper was ready, Sarah reached for her dark kerchief that hung on its peg behind the table. She folded it obliquely over her head and tied it circumspectly under her chin. Then she sat down at Noah's right hand, as a dutiful wife should, to keep him company.

Noah was allowed to have his meal in peace, but no sooner had he wiped his mouth and pushed back the dishes than Sarah continued her investigations. "You didn't tell me how much you had to pay," she said. "Was it so much that you don't like to say?"

Noah folded his arms on the edge of the table and said, "Four thousand, four hundred dollars." He attempted to smile pleasantly, but failed dismally.

"So much?" gasped Sarah.

The children stood by with questioning eyes.

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"And six hundred more for the stock," added Noah.

"It's robbery!" ejaculated Sarah.

"Five thousand dollars in all," Noah calculated it for her.

"And who made the price?"

"We both did," said Noah. "We struck what they call an average."

Sarah stared at him blankly. "An average?" she said. "What for a thing is an average, anyway?"

Noah did his best to explain, but he wasn't too sure that he knew himself. To the best of his knowledge, this was how it was done. First, Grossdoddy Wismer said how much he wanted for the farm, and then Noah said how much he was willing to pay. Two neighbours were then called in to evaluate the property. The figures were all written down, and then, somehow, they struck an average.

"Who did? The figgers or the men?" Sarah wanted to know. Business transactions always confused her. "What was it anyway that was struck?"

"I don't know," protested Noah. "I didn't do it. It was one of the neighbour men. Chosiah Ernst was his name."

"And what did he hit?"

"Nothin'."

"Nothin'! And chust now you said he hit an average, or what it was."

"I dunno nothin' about it," Noah was forced to confess. It must have been all right though, for every-

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body was satisfied with the transaction. Noah thought he had got a bargain, and the old man realized more than he had expected. No actual money was to be paid, Noah explained, as the purchase price was in the nature of a loan, upon which Noah obligated himself to pay interest annually. On the death of the old man, the farm was to come to the Horsts as an inheritance.

"I hope you didn't waste my money," said Sarah. "Because I've got plenty, that don't say you must throw it away. Them av'rages, I don't like. It looks like gamblin' with my money."

Any ordinary man would straightway have lost his temper, but Noah Horst was a Mennonite preacher, who was making an honest effort to live out during the week the gospel he proclaimed upon the Sabbath day. Among other things, he had learned to bridle his tongue—sometimes.

Sarah was really not much concerned about the price of the farm or the method used to acquire it. Cost what it might, arrange payment as they would, the significant fact, in her eyes, was that she was going to live again on the old farm at Ebytown. It had sentimental values that could never be computed in dollars and cents. It was the old Wismer homestead, and every stick and stone about the place stirred up within her all sorts of tender memories of a happy childhood. For years she had coveted it, and now at last it was actually hers.

"Pop, he wasn't any more for sellin' than you was for buyin', was he, now?" asked Sarah, forgetting

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that Noah had neglected to answer her last question.

"We both had to do what you said," replied Noah.

Sarah repudiated the idea. "What I said? Why, it was the Lord. He brought it all about."

"The Lord?"

"Yes, Him. All things work together for our good, Nooi."

It puzzled Noah to hear how adroitly Sarah could attach scriptural promises to any given circumstance of life. To him it seemed that the ways of Providence were past finding out. He saw through the glass darkly; he followed by faith, at times afar off. But Sarah seemed to enjoy an abiding consciousness that the Lord of the universe was working hand in hand with her to accomplish her very human, rather than His divine will. They were always the same, His will and hers, Sarah said, when he asked her to explain.

What better proof did Noah desire of divine intervention to meet human needs, Sarah wanted to know, than the trend of events which led up to this great turning point in their lives? There they were in the backwoods of Greenbush, with a family of young people needing education, life partners, and opportunities in life; Grossdoddy Wismer was suddenly and unexpectedly stricken with blindness and laid, as it were, on the shelf. To what purpose, she asked, if not that an opening might be provided for the Horsts? Life in Greenbush was, as it had always been, humdrum, monotonous, intolerable. Nothing but stagnation, wherever she looked. The Lord was leading

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them to the waterbrooks of Ebytown. "We can let it to Him always," she maintained, folding her arms comfortably over the roll of obesity just below her waist-line. "He knows all what we need."

"You seem to be awful thick with the Lord," remarked Noah, a trifle caustically.

"Nooi!"

"It seems He makes everybody step around smart, so you can have your way."

"Nooi!!"

"Grossdoddy must go blind, and I must sell my farm. Do you know what I think?"

"Yes, I know what you think," Sarah snapped at him, rising in all the dignity of insulted womanhood. "You don't need to say it—in front of the children anyways not."

"I think—"

"If you'd think somethin' new once," Sarah went on, her indignation waxing hot. "But year in and year out, you have always the same ideas. You're chust like Greenbush."

Noah gave his attention to the elucidation of one of his perennial thoughts. "I think that for all you talk so glib about the Lord, you're hatchin' eggs for the devil."

Sarah bit her lip. "So that's what I am to be—an old cluck?"

"It looks to me like that. Till your chickens are all hatched once, they will be all——"

"Peacocks," prompted Sarah, laughing now at her

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own cleverness. "Well, peacocks we must have, too, some." Noah wasn't so slow after all. A year or two in Ebytown, and even he might be—anything. "Meb-be the Lord wants you for a Bishop yet," she suggested, chucking her good man playfully under the chin. "Can't you give up to worry? Us Mennonites are in the world, and nobody asked us even did we want to come."

"We are in the world, yes," replied Noah, "but we must not be of the world. Romans xii. 2."

Sarah knew her Bible, too. There were Christians in Caesar's court, she reminded him. "Look at how Peter preached there, or was it Paul? And there's Mennonites in Ebytown. Ben Eby is there, and he's a Bishop yet. Nobody can say he ain't a good man. We don't have to lose our religion in Ebytown, Nooi. It will be all right. Chust let it to the Lord and me."

Noah was worsted in the argument, and he knew it. Sarah invariably got the better of him. Smart, she was, for a woman. And there stood the children crowding about, weighing the arguments, drinking in the news, their faces flushed with excitement, their eyes big with wonder. Of course they were all on their mother's side. It was her glowing optimism they wanted, not his gloomy forebodings. Too heart-sick and fearful to reply, Noah reached for his cane and retreated to an inconspicuous corner behind the stove. After all, the time for discussion had passed. The wretched bargain had been sealed. The problem of

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his life would now be to keep his family unspotted from the wickedness in Ebytown.

Sarah had gathered the children about her, and in bright colours she was painting for them a picture of their future. She had a niche in life for each to fill, some high, some low, but all alike, honourable.

"Manassah's to be the farmer," she announced, conceding to her eldest son his right of priority. "He can live in the doddy-house."

"With Hannah Stauffer?" suggested Cyrus.

Sarah said emphatically, "No. To-day I've shook myself loose from those Greenbushers forever."

"See," cried Cyrus, pointing a scornful finger at the discomfited Manassah.

"And, Ephraim, I don't know yet what you will make," continued Sarah. "Somethin' with books it must be. A farmer you will never make—never. It needs a hoe and not a book for growin' potatoes. Look once, Lydy, at what he is readin' now."

"The Martyrs' Mirror," read Lydia.

"Is that all?" On one occasion Sarah had found a novel in Ephraim's bureau. She had read it, too, from cover to cover, just to see what it was like. It wouldn't hurt her, of course, but she didn't want Ephraim to be wasting his time on such lies. The Martyrs' Mirror she had not examined, but its reputation was above reproach by reason of the fact that it had a place beside the Bible and the hymn-book in every Mennonite home.

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"And now, me," cried Cyrus, impatiently. "What will I make till I am big?"

Cyrus! The very sight of him warmed the cockles of his mother's heart. She put her arm around the boy and whispered, "Whatever you want to be, you can be, Cyrus-boy."

"I want to be a auctioneer," announced the delighted youngster. "Long ago already you said I could be one."

Sarah reaffirmed her promise.

"And can I have a horn, too, to yell with? And a Schimmel to drive myself around with?"

She promised him anything, everything.

Ephraim and Manassah exchanged amused glances. The girls giggled.

"You are all chealous at Cyrus," Sarah told them. "Cyrus can't help it that he is the smartest. It's like your pop said, you are all chust plain chickens. Cyrus is a peacock."

"He struts like one," observed Ephraim, while the child endeavoured to play the part.

"Look at what Choseph got for being smarter than his brothers." Sarah had found the parallel she sought in the Scriptures. "A big man in Egypt, he got, and he fetched them all—and Chacob, too,—out of the famine. Cyrus will pull us all up in the world yet."

The youngest of the Horsts beamed his satisfaction. If he had been, like Joseph, gifted as a sooth-sayer, he could not have predicted for himself a more roseate career. He saw himself as his fond mother

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had pictured him, the hero of his family, the uncomplimentary opinions of his brothers and sisters notwithstanding.

Presently Sarah turned her rather indifferent attention to the girls. Daughters were not much of a problem. They could be divided into two classes, those who would marry whether or no, and those who would, if some young man could be hoodwinked into desiring them. "Lydy, you'll get a man," she said, "and Esther will get an old maid."

The elder sister was unfeignedly pleased; the younger gulped a great lump down her disappointed throat.

"There must be one in every family to tend the old folks."

Another gulp.

"Ach, you don't miss much," Sarah offered the girl as a sop of consolation. "It beats all how this marryin' goes. Them that's on the outside think they must get in, and them that's in wish they could get out."

"Ain't women queer, mom?" This bit of philosophy came from Lydia, who had decided that she could afford to be patronizing towards her sex, now that she had been assured of a happy entrance into that blissful state towards which all womankind is said to be moving.

But Esther refused to be comforted. Her lower lip began to sag appreciably. Who was going to provide for her?

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"You can look to me as long as I live yet," Sarah replied. "After that you must let it to the Lord."

Esther was spared further reflection on the tragedy of a loveless old age, for at this juncture the outside door creaked upon its hinges, and into the darkest corner of the kitchen, to the side of the disconsolate Noah, crept Ezra, the nondescript son of his father's previous marriage.

"Did you feed her good?" asked Noah.

Ezra nodded.

"Did she sweat much?"

Ezra shook his head.

"You rubbed her down good, not?"

A low, affirmative grunt.

"Ain't you got no tongue even?" Sarah flung at him. "We know you ain't much with your brains."

Ezra retreated farther into the dark corner.

"Run out and make the gate shut once," said Noah.

"I let it open."

Ezra put on the hat he had just relegated to its peg. He shook down his trousers until they hung at full length midway between his knees and his ankles, and left the room as noiselessly as he had entered it.

A prolonged and ominous silence ensued. The same question had presented itself to the minds of all the group, the problem of the future of Ezra; but Cyrus alone had the temerity to put it into words. "Is he goin', too, to Ebytown?" he asked.

"Not with us," replied Sarah, without a tremor of hesitation. She glanced furtively at Noah, who was

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standing now at the window and gazing abstractedly into the blackness of the night. "Ezra don't suit to my people. Baumanns want a hired man. He can go there."

Noah stirred and sighed. One reproachful glance at Sarah he allowed himself, then opened the door and disappeared.

At this, Sarah became suddenly greatly perturbed. She ran to the window. Just as she expected, there were two dark figures in the garden. They were moving towards the clearing on the hill. "I knew it," she told the family. "Till you've lived with a man twenty years already, you know all the meanness that's in him. He's goin' up there to her grave. It's her he thinks all the time about—her and her Ezra. Me? I could be a post. I have no feelings, he thinks. That's what men are like—widow-men."

The children glanced shamefacedly at each other and thought unutterable things. It was the signal for the exchange of hasty, constrained good-nights.

So Sarah was left alone with a sputtering candle and a flood of uneasy, morbid thoughts. Over her features played the unholy passions that possessed her. She fumed; she raged. She clenched her fists and stared wildly into vacancy. "Nooi! Nooi!" was the burden of her heart; but Noah, she knew, was off pouring out his love and devotion to the wife he should have forgotten for her sake years ago.

Presently an expression of exultant triumph broke over the countenance of the incensed woman.

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There was a wicked gleam in her eye. "He's mine—mine—all mine," she told herself. "It goes only a couple of weeks yet, and he's mine. He can't take her to Ebytown. She has to stop back here in Greenbush, alone, forever."

The candle emitted one last lingering ray of light, and was lost in the darkness. A moment longer Sarah sat with her thoughts; then she rose, languidly, and groped her way to the bedroom door.

* . * * *

The preparations for the family moving began almost immediately. The conglomerate accumulations of twenty years from cellar to garret had to be investigated and sorted. There were crocks and crocks of spreadings to be bundled up beyond all recognition, bureau drawers to be turned upside down and repacked. Sarah's "ausstyer" chests were brought out and refilled with patchwork quilts and the household linens. Lovely in their spotlessness they had been when with all the joyous anticipation of a bride she had brought them to her new home, but soiled and mended now, for the most part, when as a disillusioned woman she was to take them back again to the old homestead.

Noah did not help with the packing. There were roots to be harvested before winter; there was grain to be threshed before the moving. Occasionally a prospective buyer came to inspect the farm. But sometimes it happened—and this was passing strange—that when the goodman of the house was wanted, he was

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nowhere to be found. Stranger still, he never vouchsafed any explanation of these mysterious disappearances.

The fact was Noah was indulging himself in a secret. In Ebytown he had bought from the vender of tombstones a small, gray, sandstone slab, cut in the approved Mennonite style; and he had brought it home, carefully concealed on the floor of his "dachweggli." In an obscure corner of the hay-loft he was pouring out all his heart's devotion to Rachael. It was such a comfort to him to know that when he was far away in Ebytown there would stand on her lonely grave this monument chiselled with loving care, as a perpetual memorial to the great, the only real love of his life.

It was hard work, and exacting. Her name had been inscribed, and his, the dates of her birth and death, and the days of her earthly pilgrimage. "She brought her age to nineteen years, three months and four days," had been duly recorded. Then Noah suddenly found himself face to face with a dilemma. There wasn't enough room for Job's famous utterance by which he had intended to express his own trustful acquiescence with the indiscernible ways of a beneficent Providence. In vain he searched the Scriptures to find a like sentiment expressed in fewer words. All that came to him was the stifled cry of his own distraught heart, "Oh, Lord, she was thine"; and this he finally decided to use.

The carving began again, laborious work for hands

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unskilled, as Noah's were, in the artistic use of tools. But it was a labour of love, and each difficulty that presented itself served only to warm the heart of the lover. It was all but completed now, and it looked well. The marble-cutter in Ebytown could not have done much better.

Then he made a startling discovery. The first four letters of the last word were done, but the fifth refused to go into the allotted space. Noah sat and stared blankly at it. "Oh, Lord, she was thin." It would never do. It wasn't at all what he meant to say, and Rachael had been anything but thin. Too late now to omit the "oh", and letters written in stone cannot be shifted. There was nothing to do but to carve the necessary "e" on the line above. This he did with much misgiving. It wasn't a success. His work had been marred—irreparably spoiled.

Noah was disappointed, chagrined. His first impulse was to break the stone and hide the pieces, but later he thought better of it. After all, he had done his best. It was a matter between himself and Rachael; and Rachael, he knew, would understand.

He told his secret one evening to Ezra, Rachael's son. In the darkness of the night, with only the angels peering through the starry windows of heaven as witnesses, father and son carried the stone to the clearing on the hill, and silently, reverently, they erected it over the resting-place of a loving wife and mother.

"Best not tell the others," advised Noah, when they

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returned to the house. "They wouldn't mebbe understand." The admonition was scarcely necessary. Ezra did not make a practice of telling anybody anything.

The day set for the moving was drawing near, and still there had been found no purchaser for Noah's farm. Sarah was rather disgruntled over the fact and more than a little suspicious about her husband's business acumen. She ventured to suggest ways and means of effecting the sale.

Noah told her finally that he had decided to rent the place.

"Rent!" hooted Sarah. "Rent a farm and soon it looks like the people that rent. Nix-nutz!"

Noah reminded her that they were virtually renting her father's farm.

"That's different," said Sarah. "It's all in the family."

"So is this," said Noah. "I'm going to let the farm with Ezra."

"With Ezra? Alone?"

"With him and Salome Baumann," replied Noah. "It seems she's set her cap for him."

CHAPTER II

First Days at Ebytown

THE Horsts reached Ebytown, bag and baggage, in ample time for the big Wismer sale. It had meant an early morning start and a long drive, but an auction sale was a social event scarcely to be ignored, and this one afforded the Horsts an immediate and much-desired opportunity of introducing themselves to their new friends and neighbours.

The weather was all that could be desired. For the middle of October it was a remarkable day, with plenty of sunshine to keep the crowd in that happy, liberal state of mind so conducive to a successful sale.

Old Elias Wismer sat in his arm-chair on the stoop and welcomed the people as they arrived.

"How goes it to-day, Elias?" said Preacher Josiah Ernst, bending down over the armchair from his height of six feet two. "Do you know me yet, I wonder?"

The old man turned his sightless eyes upon the visitor and shook his hand with fervour. "Ach, it's Chosiah," he said. "I know you at the voice."

"I guess mebbe it goes a little hard with you to-day," suggested Josiah.

"Ach, a little," admitted Elias. "It goes always hard when we must give up and set."

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"And if we don't see yet," said Josiah, "that's about as hard as it can be."

Elias shook his head. "We must not grumble," he said. "We must take what He sends us all."

"The good and the bad together."

"Say 'the good and the not so good', Chosiah," was the blind man's gentle rebuke. "He sends only what is good for us."

The clock indoors struck two. Immediately all eyes turned upon the auctioneer who had just arrived. He was a young man, corpulent and jocular. His smile was engaging; his very presence exuded good nature. Having chosen the most substantial-looking of the chairs on the verandah, he elevated on it with great care and precision his two-hundred-odd pounds, took off his coat, rolled up his shirt-sleeves, and proceeded to enliven the crowd with a few jokes and running comments of local interest. Here was a real auctioneer, a type for young Cyrus to emulate.

"On with the sale, Fat," cried a voice from the crowd, when the entertainer paused a moment for breath. Upon investigation, it proved to be Simeon Ernst who had interjected this provocative remark. Young Simeon had inherited from his father, Preacher Josiah Ernst, not only a tall, spare physical frame, but also much spiritual prowess and considerable ability as a preacher.

"What's your hurry, Sliver?" retorted the auctioneer. "Say, do you want to buy a wagon-load of furniture to start housekeeping with?"

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This sally provoked a loud and prolonged outburst of laughter. It was a matter of common report that the young preacher had long been looking around with matrimonial intent among the young Mennonite women of Ebytown.

When the auctioneer was satisfied with both the size and the mood of his audience, he motioned Leah, the unmarried daughter of the house, to hand him some china. "Dr. Syntax plates! Ei! Ei!" he exclaimed. "How many?"

"Eight," Leah told him.

"Eight. And some has the pattern rubbed a little off," he said. "Leah was usin' them mebbe for feedin' the cats."

A burst of laughter greeted this suggestion. Leah herself was not a little amused at the pleasantry, for everyone within a radius of ten miles knew how ardently she hated the whole feline family.

The plates brought a fairly good price, twenty cents apiece. Heigho! The sale was off to a good start.

"Next," cried Fat.

She handed him a large platter in the willow pattern, blue, with trees and a dragon, a seat in a garden, and a pair of lovers.

"The whole set?"

"Some of the cups is broke," said Leah. "And the spout ain't on the tea-pot, and the handle of the sugar-bowl is glued on, and a couple of plates is cracked, and . . ."

"Psch!" cried Fat, stage-whispering behind the

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elevated platter. "How many of them there dishes is there goin' to be left to sell?"

With much merriment the bidding began, and presently, in spite of Leah's indiscretion, the dinner set sold for half the price of a new one. "Here's a pewter plate to throw in for good luck," the auctioneer said, picking up an old piece and tossing it to the successful bidder. "Till your willows are all smashed already, you can eat off that. It don't break."

They brought out then all sorts of odd pieces of china, glass and cutlery, brass candlesticks, too, and snuffers, things of little monetary value but much sought after for sentimental reasons. Here was a rare opportunity to get something by which to remember Grossmommy Wismer, who had passed beyond the veil five years before. "Here's something that she fetched along over from Pennsylvania yet," they would tell their visitors in years to come. "Yes, that was hers. She wasn't sixty yet, and not a gray hair in her head, but she had to go, too, and let all her nice things set."

Then the scene of activity changed. Fat stepped down from his chair at the east end of the long verandah and mounted another at the west end, where quantities of old furniture were displayed.

"Grossdoddy's old desk!" cried Salinda Ernst, wife of one preacher and mother of another. "That would go good to our chairs."

"They won't sell that," replied Josiah, clutching

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his purse in his trousers' pocket. He was mortally scared he was going to have to buy it for her.

Yes, it was for sale. Fat's eyes lighted upon it first of all. He began at once to extol its good points, a book-case on the top, four drawers below and a writing-desk between. "Look at all the pigeon-holes, chust," he said, when he had opened it to public view. "Every bird can sleep alone. Now, how much will you give for this desk of solid walnut?"

"There's secret drawers, too," added Leah. There wasn't going to be any misapprehension about that desk, if she knew it.

"Where?" was the universal demand.

Leah stepped forward, pulled out one compartment, and revealed to the eyes of the curious onlookers four little, unsuspected drawers behind.

Fat held his sides and laughed. "You couldn't help it, Leah," he said, between spasms. "Women are like that."

Leah was huffed. She did not appreciate being held up to public ridicule, especially at her own father's sale. "I can hold a secret if I want to," she declared. But why withhold the knowledge of a hidden cabinet from that company of honest people?

Preacher Josiah thought he had a good excuse for not buying the desk. "If she hadn't 've told . . .," he said, insinuatingly.

"Then you wouldn't 've known," was Salinda's reply.

Noah Horst bought the desk in spite of its dis-

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closed secret. He paid a good price for it, too. Sarah had always admired it, he knew, and he wanted to lay something substantial on the altar of sacrifice to atone for his marital failings in the past and to ensure an auspicious beginning of this new chapter in their married life. He bought the kitchen chairs, too, and the big brass soap-kettle. The grandfather clock, which old Elias Wismer had inherited from his father and brought with infinite pains over the Alleghanies to his new home in the wilderness of Canada, was in grave danger of passing out of the family, but once more Noah rose to the occasion and paid for it a fabulous price, thirty dollars. Sarah's face beamed with satisfaction.

"He must be rich, this Nooi Horst, that he can buy so much," remarked more than one interested spectator.

The Horsts were creating a mild sensation at the sale. It was not that they tried to make themselves conspicuous, but simply because they were the un-offending objects of a neighbourly curiosity. Sarah's probable age was computed to a nicety, and Lydia's matrimonial prospects were discussed. Manassah and Hannah were obviously bride and groom, since they held each other's hands. Ephraim, it was reported, wasn't much good. The little girl "favoured him", and the little boy "favoured her". Some said that "him and her didn't. . ."

"Ach, so?" Surprise and regret was always expressed thereby. "What was the trouble?"

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There was sure to be somebody in the group who knew about Ezra that they "let back in Greenbush because he didn't suit to her people". The trouble was, "Nooi wasn't for comin' to Ebytown," it was said. "That was her idea."

"And her money, too, by what I hear," observed Salinda, who had earned a reputation for being able beyond the ordinary run of women to sum up a whole argument in a nutshell. "Ach, well, it will go better now that he's give in to do what she says."

When Fat and his train had departed and the sale and the supper were over, the young Horsts expected that they would have a long-anticipated opportunity of inspecting their new home. But Grossdoddy Wismer was still the host, and he had other plans for the evening.

Seated in his big armchair in the front room, the old man prepared to review Sarah's children. From Manassah to Cyrus they passed before him, while he stared at them with his sightless eyes, and felt their height and the strength of their muscles. He inquired about their general health, their mental attainments, their spiritual state, and their daily conduct. But with all his questioning he was very kind, very indulgent, indeed, for when they had all been cross-examined, including Manassah's bashful young bride, he summoned his daughter Leah and said, "Look once if the rock candy is all."

"It gives a couple of pieces yet," she told him.

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"Then you can hand them out as long as they last," said Grossdoddy. "Start with the bubbly."

The designation did not please young Cyrus, but he was shrewd enough not to endanger his prospects of a liberal share of the sweets by voicing the protest that arose within him.

Leah brought out the candy bag and distributed the contents. There was enough to go around and a second piece for the "bubby". "Grossmommy was always so great for rock candy," said Leah, becoming reminiscent. "I mind yet how she used to carry all the time some in her pocket, and every once in so often she would help herself to a nibble."

Cyrus did not remember his grandmother in the flesh, but it was not hard to conjure up a very vivid picture of what the old lady must have been. All the grandmothers he knew looked alike. They had the same short, dumpy figure, clad in black, with a dint around the middle where the apron-strings were tied, a white cap encircling a smiling face, and a huge pocket hidden somewhere in the folds of an ample skirt. Rock candy, of course, went with the picture, which was not quite complete without a plate of curly fat-cakes on a near-by table. Fat-cakes! "Rock candy is all right," Cyrus felt constrained to remark, "but fat-cakes. . ." A vigorous rub around his little stomach left no doubt as to his meaning.

Aunt Leah jumped up, went forthwith to the cellar, and returned, bearing a plate of the most delectable, curly, brown fat-cakes imaginable. She had

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baked them, and many other appetizing things, and stowed them away in the cellar, she said, against the wearisome days of settling.

"Ach, Leah, you spoil him," protested Sarah.

"I don't spoil him any worse than you do," retaliated Leah. "I'm sure you don't need to talk."

"Well, we must say thank you anyway," declared Sarah.

Grossdoddy was getting uneasy. He thought it was time to go to his new home in the village. He did not want to be out after dark.

"But whether it's dark or light don't show at your eyes," said Sarah.

The old man smiled wanly. "You think I can't see," he said. "I can see a lot more than some that has two eyes and specs into the bargain."

Sarah meditated a moment and said, "If you see so good, mebbe you can tell me what you hit that clay Nooi was down and bought the farm. He said it was such an av'rage, or what it was."

"We struck an average, yes."

"And what for a thing is that anyway? Nooi couldn't tell me, with all his eyes."

Neither could old blind Elias. "An average," he stammered, "why, that's chust what it is—an average."

Sarah shrugged her shoulders impatiently. "You talk in rings," she said. "If you don't know what he hit, why don't you say so?"

"He didn't hit nothing," declared Grossdoddy, with emphasis.

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"And chust now you said he hit an average," argued the daughter. "Can't nobody tell me what you did all?"

Old Elias did his best to explain, but to no avail.

"Men are all alike blind," declared Sarah, a trifle testily. "I wonder how long it goes yet till I find out what for a thing an average is anyway."

Old Elias made no further comment. Noah was at the back door with the light wagon, ready to take him and Leah to their new home in the village. The old man reached for his cane, and Leah brought his hat and coat, and helped him put them on. But Elias Wismer was not to be hurried in his farewell to the home of many tender associations. He cast his sightless eyes about the room, sighed, wiped away the tears that rolled down his cheeks. Then he sank back again into his chair and dropped his chin upon his chest. Nobody could say a word, though Noah kept calling in from time to time that he was waiting.

"Whether they're coming?" answered Sarah, at last. "That was a dumm question now." She turned to her father, patted him on the back and said, "Come. It's time."

"You must let everything to the Lord," put in Cyrus, opportunely, as he thought.

Presently the old man signified that he was ready. Manassah opened the door, and helped him into the wagon, while Noah held the horses with steady rein.

"Go on," said Noah.

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"Wait, Nooi," cried Sarah, in the very nick of time. "He must have his armchair yet."

"Whoa," called the driver.

"Ei! Ei!" exclaimed Leah. "What would he do without his armchair yet?"

"Yes, what?" echoed Grossdoddy.

Ephraim brought the chair and put it in the back of the wagon. Noah lifted the reins and started the wheels revolving. They were on the road—gone—their backs turned to their old home, their faces towards the new.

"Ach, him and his old black armchair," sighed Sarah. "It don't go long now till he don't need it no more."

"And he must chust set and wait till the end," soliloquized Manassah.

"The end!" exclaimed Ephraim. "It seems to me like it's the beginning. Chust think once, walls of jasper and pearly gates and streets of solid gold."

"What's all that to Grossdoddy anyway?" said Sarah. "I wonder sometimes will there be a old black armchair for him in heaven. He can't take his. How will us Mennonites suit to that gold and glitter up there anyway? Will we feel to home, say?"

"It won't be heaven if we don't," said Manassah.

"It's most like heaven here," declared Lydia.

"Well, anyway, it's home," said Sarah, pleased with Lydia's evident delight in her new abode. "After all them Greenbush years, this is home."

With the first dawn of morning the Horsts were

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up and ready for a tour of inspection about the premises. It was, indeed, a home to be proud of. The house was a large frame structure, painted white, with solid shutters of a vivid green. The windows had fifteen panes and the doors as many panels. It had been built, after the style of the Mennonites, for two families, with two large, hospitable front doors opening on a wide, white-washed verandah, extending across the front of the house. In one part Noah and Sarah were to live with the unmarried members of their family, while Manassah and Hannah were to begin their married life in the other. It was all as Sarah had planned it years before, except that Hannah had usurped the place that the mother had designed for some fair, unknown maiden of Ebytown.

The picket fence that surrounded the spacious grounds was painted white to match the house. Inside stood a number of tall, stalwart trees, horse-chestnuts, for the most part, and outside was a row of young maples, whose trunks were protected by temporary frames from the onslaughts of the foraging cattle of the roadside. The tie-post near the gate had been chewed down to half its height, an unsightly thing, but an evidence of many years of friendly welcome.

Manassah's interest was absorbed in the barn. He lost no time in inspecting it from root-cellar to hay-loft. "There's stalls for twenty head of cattle," he said, "and such fat pigs I never did see."

"Nor I such dirty ones," remarked Ephraim, drily.

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"Wait till we get at them once with our scrub-brush and elbow grease," advised Manassah.

Ephraim pinched his nose dramatically and turned away. The pig-stye had no attraction for him.

Manassah was full of plans for improvement and expansion. When he looked over the broad acres of well-cultivated land, he saw them stretching farther and farther into the forest. The granaries were full of grain; larger ones were needed. The farm fired Manassah with a great ambition to rise above his fellows in the practice of the ancient and honourable calling of agriculture.

Noah was delighted to find in Manassah a son of such promise. If only Ephraim—"Ach, Ephraim." That was all the old man would allow himself to say, but mentally he likened his second son to a lazy, indifferent hired man.

Meanwhile the children, Esther and Cyrus, were exploring forbidden territory in the wash-house. There they were, the naughty youngsters, in the darkest corner of the smoke-room, groping along the sooty walls and counting the meat-hooks on the rod, like beads on an abacus. From time to time they emitted strange, discordant noises, calculated to frighten themselves and each other into the belief that the place was infested with lions and other gruesome creatures of the imagination.

The explorations continued. At one side of the fireplace Esther noticed high up on the wall a small aperture carefully guarded with a latched door. It

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was enough to arouse in Cyrus the spirit of adventure. He mounted a chair, lifted the latch, opened the door and peered in.

"Hold your nose so the toads don't bite it off," warned Esther.

"Toads!" scoffed the boy. "Who's a-scared of toads? Not me. Anyways, there ain't none." He had wriggled his little body through the hole, and all that Esther could see of him was a pair of dangling, diminutive legs.

"Come back!" cried the frightened girl. "I'm going to tell on you." She began to give vent to her terror in a storm of tears.

"Cry-bubby!" Cyrus flung at her. "That's what girls are—cry-bubbies." He was up now and entirely out of sight. His little voice sounded very distant, very sepulchral. "Fraidy-cats!"

"Cy! Cy!" cried Esther, seized now with a vague terror that something was going to happen to her brother, and that it was going to be laid to her charge. "I'm coming, too, Cy." She climbed upon the chair and tried to lift herself up by the force of her elbows.

"You're not," answered Cyrus from the tomb into which he had disappeared. "I won't help you."

"I saw the hole first," argued Esther.

She was almost up when Cyrus came to the opening and pushed her back. She slipped on the chair and fell prostrate on the floor.

"He! He!" laughed the naughty boy. "It serves you right."

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Esther had in her moral make-up a little streak of determination. She refused to stay "put" in the place where fate in the form of her brother's ruthless arm had thrust her. As soon as Cyrus was out of sight and hearing, she climbed up again, and this time she succeeded. She found herself sitting on the spot where she had last seen her brother.

"Cy! Cy!" she called, but there was no answer. She stared desolately into the darkness beyond.

Presently she was able to discern the dim outline of a moving figure, crawling on all fours towards a ray of light at the other end of the narrow cell in which she found herself. Was it a bear, or a gigantic toad? "Cy! Cy!" she whispered frantically.

"Shut up!" came the consoling answer.

Over the great cement coils of the bake oven the children climbed, now on their hands and knees, and now flat on their stomachs, over nails and projections that tore their clothes, and through grime and dirt that stuck everywhere.

They came at last to the attic of the wash-house, with rafters for ceiling and beams for a floor. Through a tiny window in the gable streamed a ray of indifferent light.

Esther stumbled over the beams to the window and pressed her little nose against the pane. Instantly she felt a prick at that intangible thing people call conscience. The window looked directly into Hannah's summer kitchen. Somehow it made her think of her mother.

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"I feel for going down now," she told Cyrus. "We won't tell where we were, will we, Cy?"

Cyrus had neither conscience about staying nor fear of being discovered. He was intent upon walking a beam and balancing himself for the feat with extended arms. He dared Esther to do it without side-stepping. Esther soon proved that she was even more proficient than he at this new game. What a jolly time they were having! Such a wonderful play-house! How glad they were to live in Ebytown!

"Esther!" The voice was loud and deep and very imperative—her mother's. "Where is Cyrus?"

The merriment died away into guilty silence, and two dirty, ragged, shame-faced children crept back again over the coils of the bake-oven and through the aperture in the wall into the accusing presence of their mother. Instinctively they stretched out their hands to hide their grimy clothes. Cyrus was successful in educing a pair of crocodile tears, which bore all the ear-marks of genuine repentance.

"So this is how you do what I tell you not to," stormed Sarah, concentrating her wrath upon Esther. "Look once at your clothes chust. You could be niggers both of you. I'll learn you."

"She dragged me in," wailed the boy. "I didn't want to go but she made me." A veritable son of Adam was Cyrus.

"That much I know," said Sarah.

"I didn't," protested Esther. "Long ago I wanted

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to stop already, but Cy he egged me all the time on. I had to go after him."

She might have spared herself the effort, for Sarah would not listen. Excuses were vain. She knew the depths of depravity of which Esther was capable. They were both naughty, and they must be punished. She would show Cyrus a dark hole under the stairway that he hadn't yet seen, and . . .

"It was her!" shrieked Cyrus. "You can put her in the dark hole."

"That's too good for her," said Sarah. "She must go in the bettel-room."

Cyrus stopped his whimpering. "The bettel-room?" he said, "What's that?"

"A place Grossdoddy made in the high garret for tramps," Sarah explained, softening towards Cyrus, at least. "It's so they don't set fire to the barn in the night." There was nothing in the room, she said, but an old rope bedstead and a straw tick that went with the house, because nobody would think of wanting it.

"Mice?" inquired Cyrus. "Esther creeps so with the mice."

Sarah promised enough rodents of one kind or another to bring the girl to penitence. But the punishment of both children was to be deferred till a more convenient season. The conestoga wagon was full of furniture to be unpacked and set in place. Saturday noon, it was, or would be soon, and nothing done. "If only we don't go and get wisiters yet," Sarah said. "If they would wait till we are all clean again."

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But the visitors did not bide Sarah's time. In the middle of the afternoon, when the Horsts were still busy with the unpacking, some of them dirty, some sullen, and all alike uninviting, a rap was heard at the front door. Sarah peeped cautiously and discovered their caller to be no less a person than Bishop Benjamin Eby.

Fortunately, a place had been designated early in the day for the family comb. Sarah seized it frantically, applied it briskly, but effectively, to Noah's hair, pushed the victim of circumstances headlong into the front room and shut the door.

Now Noah was a modest man and naturally reticent in the presence of his superiors. But the Bishop greeted him so cordially that there was established between them, once and for all, a bond of Christian fellowship. They were brothers together in the Lord.

"I'm glad He brought you to Ebytown," said the Bishop.

Noah had a mad impulse to reply that it wasn't He who was responsible for his change of residence, but the inevitable she. He contented himself, however, with the remark that he wished he could have stayed back in Greenbush, where he had lived ever since, as a boy of seven, he had come over from Pennsylvania.

"That was in . . .?"

"In 1807," replied Noah. "I came with you over."

"Ach so? Was you Reuben Horst's boy?"

"Yes. I mind the big barrel of silver dollars you had in your conestoga."

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"There was ten thousand dollars," said the Bishop. "With that money we bought Greenbush."

Noah knew that, of course. He declared that he would never forget the queer look that came into his mother's eyes when she actually saw Greenbush for the first time. She had thought it would be so different. Not a step out of Pennsylvania would she have gone, if she had dreamed she was going to be buried alive in a wilderness. Bush, bush—nothing but bush—and more bush. Five miles of bush to the nearest neighbour. She had lived only two years, and then they buried her, literally, in the wilderness of Upper Canada.

"Mary is gone, too," said the Bishop. He spoke her name tenderly, wistfully.

Noah remembered Mary, to be sure, Ben Eby's radiant bride. In that long, tiresome journey to Canada she was the life of the party, with a kind word for everybody and a bit of candy for the children. Indeed, Noah could not forget Mary. "She was always so kind, so gentle, so contented," he told the Bishop. Those were the attributes which he ascribed to his own loved Rachael.

"She went with the cholera, Mary did," said the Bishop. "That was in '34, fourteen years ago already. It was in the spring that the new meeting-house got built in the fall. She wanted so to wait till she could see that yet."

The Bishop went on to tell of the ravages of the Asiatic cholera which had carried his Mary off. It

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had started in Shade's Mills, the Scotch settlement twelve miles to the south. There was to be exhibited in that village such an aggregation of wild beasts as had never been seen anywhere in the vicinity before. The whole community was on the tip-toe of expectation, and the excitement had spread even to Ebytown. The young people were crazy to see it.

The great day dawned. It was insufferably hot. By seven o'clock the people began to pour into the streets of the village. A disturbing rumour got abroad that one of the showmen who had arrived in Shade's Mills a day or two in advance of the menagerie, had fallen ill, and psch!—it might be cholera. An effort was made to stop the exhibition, but the disappointment of the people as well as the monetary consideration and the opportunity it afforded to magnify the importance of the village in the eyes of the world,—these must be considered. On with the show!

A meagre collection of half-starved animals, filthy and odorous, were led into the ring. The show was a dismal failure. The disappointed crowd left the tent only to be greeted by the alarming news that the showman had died, and that the village doctor had pronounced his malady a most virulent type of Asiatic cholera.

The frightened crowd dispersed to their homes. Ten days later the plague was raging with unparalleled fatality. Two days more and fully one-fifth of the villagers had fallen victims to the dread pestilence. In thirty-six hours as many unceremonious burials

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had been held. All the Shade's Mills people who had not been carried to the cemetery were either in bed or on their knees.

Things were nearly as bad in Ebytown. Dr. John Scott, late of the University of Edinburgh, with a great string of medals to his credit, was as helpless as a babe. Many who had not so much as attended the circus were down with the disease, and some had died before the doctor could be summoned. Among them Mary.

The Bishop heaved a sigh and lapsed into silence. Noah dropped his head upon his chest and thought not of Mary but of Rachael. Yes, he and the Bishop were brothers in sorrow.

Sarah missed the sound of the men's voices and concluded that they had exhausted their topics of conversation. The time seemed opportune for her appearance, so she bustled into the room ostensibly for the purpose of inquiring about the school. Cyrus was with her, scrubbed radiantly clean and arrayed in his Sunday clothes.

Noah did not offer to introduce his wife. Indeed, both men remained seated and waited for Sarah to introduce herself. This she did by shoving Cyrus into the foreground. "He's to go to school," she said. "Don't he look smart?"

The Bishop had to admit that Cyrus appeared to be a boy of parts and promise. He would see to it that he should have every opportunity to "advance himself with his mind."

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"And Esther?" ventured Noah. "She's to go, too, not?"

Sarah explained that Esther had been a very naughty girl, and as a punishment she was being deprived of the privilege of meeting the Bishop that day. The next time he called—perhaps—or would he "stop for supper"?

It was not a pressing invitation, but it served as a reminder that the afternoon was wearing to a close. The Bishop bestirred himself and declared he must go. "She" would be expecting him. But he would have a few words of prayer with the family, if Noah would be good enough to call them.

In they filed, shook hands with the Bishop, and dropped on their knees before the nearest chair. The Bishop raised his voice and invoked a blessing upon the individual members of the family. Especially and most earnestly did he pray for the absent Esther, whom a pious mother was diligent in seeking to wrest from the clutches of the evil one. And might they all be brought at last an unbroken family into the presence of the Eternal One that they might praise Him forever and ever. Amen.

"Amen," echoed Noah, from the depths of his anxious heart.

"Thank you for the wisit," said Sarah, rising from her knees with difficulty because of the embarrassing volume of her skirts. "Sundays we go early to meeting. Will you want Nooi up with the preachers?"

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"Ach, yes," said the Bishop. "That's what I come to say."

Sarah smiled. "Nooi is that way, too, sometimes," she said, "kind of loose-like in his mind."

So the good Lord brought it about that when the people came crowding into the meeting-house for service on Sunday morning, Noah Horst was occupying a place on the preachers' bench behind the pulpit. Sarah knew that he was going to be the cynosure of all eyes, so she saw to it that his moustache was properly clipped and his beard and side whiskers combed with precision. It was the Lord's doings, but she did not allow herself to forget that she was His handmaiden.

It was the usual Sunday morning convocation for worship and prayer, a simple service. Much was lacking in colour and interest from a worldly point of view, but it was all that the lowly people required to establish communion between their hungry souls and the Bountiful Giver. What need had they of printed prayers who could so spontaneously pour out the desires of their hearts? Why an elevated choir and instruments of music when the people could, unaccompanied, lift their united voices to the Most High in such a sweet paean of praise?

There were five preachers behind the long pulpit, and each had a duty to perform. One stood with hands outstretched towards heaven, while he led the kneeling congregation through the valley of contrition to the foot of Jehovah's throne. Josiah Ernst arose

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at the proper time to announce the marriage banns. The direction of the singing was undertaken by his son, Simeon, who read the hymns, two lines at a time, with the singing interspersed. It devolved upon Noah to read the Scriptures, and this he did in such good voice and with such splendid oratorical effect that he created a profound impression and engendered much pride in Sarah's anxious heart.

Then the Bishop rose, and with never a note or comment save those that were written on the tables of his heart, he preached once again the glad tidings of a full and perfect salvation through the blood of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. There was no excitement, no sign of over-wrought emotion. The Mennonites worshipped God after the manner of their fathers, with simplicity but, withal, with dignity and restraint.

The sermon over, the preachers rose in turn to make some comment appropriate to the occasion. One liked the emphasis the Bishop had put upon the omnipotence of God; another was impressed as never before with the awful depravity of man. Noah made no remark about the sermon, but he was glad for an opportunity to express his desire that the Lord might use him in this, his new sphere of influence. Finally, Simeon Ernst rose, and voiced a sweeping commendation of all the Bishop had said, and also of all he didn't say.

"He means all I didn't have time to say," said the

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Bishop, rising to call for a season of private prayer before he pronounced the benediction.

Sarah was unfeignedly pleased. She was proud of the conspicuous part Noah had had in the service, and she was delighted with the cordiality the women had shown to her and to the girls. It was wonderful to be living again in Ebytown.

All this she told to Noah, as soon as she could get him off alone. "And do you know, Nooi," she said, "the Lord dropped a thought in my mind when we was at the meeting."

"So?" said the husband, with luke-warm interest. Most of Sarah's thoughts she imputed to the Lord.

"It's about Lydy," she confided. "Is he married already, do you know?"

"Whether who's married?"

"Him, the young preacher."

"Simeon Ernst, you mean?"

"Yes, him."

"No, he ain't yet."

"Nooi Horst, you're plain dumm," cried the exasperated wife. "Must I drag everything out of you yet? How do you know he ain't?"

Noah had only circumstantial evidence to offer, but it was conclusive enough for all that. "He's comin' over evenings some day," was the reply, "and he didn't say nothing about fetching her along."

CHAPTER III

A Prediction Comes True

SIMEON ERNST'S promised visit was the first of many. During the winter months he came twice a week and sat with Noah beside the kitchen stove. It was theology that absorbed their attention, and so profound were their discussions that everyone else was content to sit and listen. Where did those Methodists get their authority for baptising infants? Certainly not in the Scriptures. Oh, yes. "He took little children in His arms and blessed them," and He said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven," but there wasn't as much as a mention of the water essential to baptism. And how did the Dunkards get their notion about immersion, except by reading their own biased notions into the Scriptures? Wasn't it more reasonable to believe that John poured the water on Jesus, as was the custom of the Menonites? The Catholics, with chants and printed prayers, came in for their share of criticism. "How can they feel to home with God," Noah wanted to know, "if they must make always such scraping and bowing to talk to Him even"?

"The worst of it is they don't talk to Him at all," replied Simeon. "It's all to her—the Virgin Mary."

"Such foolishness," said Noah. "And look once

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at them Swedenborgians, and at them Lutherians. I tell you they're all wrong—all but the Mennonites."

"And some of them even are a little what you might say queer," Simeon thought.

Sarah was much impressed with the young preacher and his powers of argumentation. He seemed to bring out the best that was in Noah. He made him think. Upon Manassah, too, he was bound to have a salutary influence, concentrating that young man's desultory thinking upon the verities of theology and religion. Decidedly, Simeon Ernst was a man worth cultivating to the good of her family. So, very gradually and very subtly, she threw about the young paragon the marks of her favour. It began to be evident that she had "settled" upon him.

"Set an extry plate to-night, Lydy," she said one evening, when she was helping her daughter prepare the supper.

"Who's comin'?" asked Lydia. It was a strange question, with Simeon Ernst sitting there with her father, and the clock striking five.

"Him," answered Sarah, jerking her thumb Simeon-ward.

Lydia hid her blushing face in the corner cupboard.

Sarah was at her elbow with an insinuating nudge. "Ain't you going to help him, Lydy?" she said.

"Help him what?"

"Help him—ach, well, you know what. Two months he's coming here already settin' up with your

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pop. What if he would forget he came to see *you*? You must help him."

"I can't," declared Lydia.

"You could ast him to stop to supper," suggested her mother. "If you want a man, you must feed him good. Don't you know that yet?" It was elementary wisdom, though Lydia professed to be ignorant of it.

"And till we are et," the instructor continued, "me and Nooi are going to Schwartzentruber's over. It seems we must get Ephraim a chob. And you must stop and talk to him."

"To Ephraim?" asked Lydia, in all innocence.

"No, to him." Another jerk of the informing thumb. "Ephraim must come with us to get his chob, such a book-binding one."

"But Esther and Cyrus . . . " began Lydia.

"They must go to bed."

The girl had another suggestion. "To Manassah's he could go."

"To-night Manassahs are not to home," said Sarah. "He's going over to Baer's to get him a hired man for the work that Ephraim won't do, and she's going along to wisit."

It seemed as though every avenue of escape was cut off. Lydia stared blankly at her mother. "You ain't going to coop me up with him—alone," she cried, in alarm.

"Try it once," encouraged her mother. "We'll see what you can make."

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"But what can we talk about?" said Lydia, full of anxious confusion. "I don't know no religion."

"Then leave him learn you some," advised Sarah. "He can do all the talkin'. He don't give much, I think, for such a bold girl that is big with her mouth."

With palpitating heart Lydia set the extra plate for Simeon. Mennonite etiquette demanded that he sit on the bench with the boys directly opposite her own place at table. Throughout the meal the girl sat with downcast eyes. If she started to say something, she straightway forgot it. If she tried to swallow, the food stuck in her throat.

"It looks like Lydia is sick," Noah whispered to Sarah.

For answer he got a kick under the table. But he failed to comprehend until Sarah whispered behind her hand, "Luf-sick. If you ain't the blabber-maul."

Noah reached and speared another slice of bread. He spent the rest of the meal in the mastication of the staff of life, and in the assimilation of this new idea which his better half had succeeded in projecting so adroitly into his mind.

Supper over, Sarah got the Bible, and opening it, apparently by chance, at the Book of Genesis, said, "To-night we read this." She indicated the passage she desired.

Noah was very obedient, and with a deep, low voice he read the beautiful story of Isaac's wooing of Rebecca. Then they all knelt while the nominal head of the house implored divine care and protection

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throughout the night. Each member of the family was held up individually before the Lord for a special blessing. Nor did he forget the young man who, if Sarah had her way, was soon to become more than a casual guest.

When the dishes were washed, Sarah announced that she and Noah had to take Ephraim to Schwartzentruber's. It was too bad, but Ephraim had to have a "chob".

Simeon was disappointed, and he showed it. He ventured to explain that, for their entertainment and edification that evening, he had been about to launch into a dissertation on the resurrection of the body. It was a little disconcerting to find himself suddenly without an audience.

"There's Lydy," Sarah reminded him. "You can tell it to her."

But Simeon soon discovered that in spite of Sarah's encouragement, the profound subject he had chosen did not suit the occasion. Lydia seemed to be more interested in the transitory things of time, such as floor mats, than she was in the dead and the probability of their ultimate revivification in the life eternal. There seemed to be nothing for Simeon to do but to twirl his awkward thumbs and try to hide his embarrassment.

"It's a fine night," the poor fellow ventured to remark. He had been in the house since four o'clock, and he hadn't the remotest idea what sort of weather was brewing.

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"Yes," agreed Lydia, whose knowledge of the prevailing elements was equally negligible.

An interminable period of time passed, so it seemed, with Simeon's eyes on Lydia and Lydia's on her work.

"Is it hard hookin' mats?" asked the young man, at length. He congratulated himself on hitting upon one of the very few subjects with which the fair girl before him seemed to be conversant.

Only another monosyllable, a negative one at that. Lydia had a wild impulse to put the canvas and the hook into his awkward masculine hands and let him try it. Should she undertake the next-to-impossible task of teaching him how to do it? She wanted to talk, to be agreeable, but her mother's warning rang in her ears. She had it on her incontrovertible authority that Simeon "wouldn't give much for such a bold girl that is big with her mouth". And above all things she wanted Simeon to want her.

The young man stood up presently, took the poker and stirred the fire. Then he sat down in Noah's big armchair and remarked that it seemed rather chilly.

Whether it was or not, Lydia neither knew nor cared. But she would have given almost anything but her hope of eternal salvation to dispel the terrible atmosphere of constraint which enveloped her. They weren't getting anywhere. She was losing him. Would her mother never come?

Presently there was a scratching at the door, and the family cat entered the room, with arched back and

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uplifted tail. She went directly to where Simeon sat sprawling in Noah's armchair, and rubbed her sleek, fat side against his trousers.

Simeon picked up the pet, and stuck her in the corner of his elbow. He glanced at Lydia. Her eyes were lifted momentarily. They met his, but only for a brief, confused second. Once more the mat absorbed her attention.

Again silence reigned, save for the loud purring of the contented cat, and the constant pulling of the hook through the canvas of the mat. The old grandfather clock ticked away, very slowly, very apprehensively.

"Lydy," said Simeon, acting upon a sudden impulse, "is this your cat?"

"Yes," said the girl, looking up bashfully. "Why?" She hoped Simeon would not consider the question bold.

"Because," said the equally bashful youth, "I want to hold something of yours. It can be only your cat."

Du liewige Zeit! What had he said? Lydia sprang up, dropping her hook and her mat and her rags in one conglomerate heap on the floor, and rushed out of the room by the nearest exit.

Simeon was dumbfounded. He dumped the startled cat unceremoniously upon Lydia's mat, seized his coat and hat from the peg behind the stove and started for the door—not the same door, of course, through which Lydia had made her escape, but the outside one. He had been insulted, grossly insulted.

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No other girl had ever run away from him. He wasn't the kind of fellow the girls ran away from. He was going home. That was all he wanted to do with the Horsts.

But at the gate the indignant young man met the party returning from the Schwartzentrubers'.

Sarah scented trouble at once. "Where's Lydy?" she asked, trying to make her voice sound as natural as possible.

"She ran away on me," sulked Simeon. "She don't want me, and I can tell you I don't want her."

The situation was crucial. It required tact and discretion. But Sarah was equal to it. "If ever the Lord made two people for each other," she told Simeon, "you're them two, you and Lydy." She caught the young man's arm in a familiar mother-in-lawish sort of way, and tried to lead him gently towards the house.

Simeon's masculine pride had been too deeply wounded to be so easily salved. He shook himself loose and walked away in a pout.

"Ketch him, Nooi," admonished Sarah. "Fetch him back till I get Lydy once. Ephraim, you can go in your bed, as quick as you otherwise can. Such things is not for your eyes and ears."

To tell the truth, Noah preferred to keep his fingers out of this pie which Sarah professed to be baking for the Lord. Let them bake it who were to eat it was his policy. But he liked the fellow, and Lydia would "make him a good wife". Besides, Sarah

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wanted it. So Noah followed the very eligible young man. "Simeon!" he called. His voice was full of kindly sympathy.

The wrath was subsiding. The tall figure had stopped; it was coming towards Noah.

"It would make us all very much pleasure, Simeon."

"But it's Lydy." There was some wounded pride still unappeased. "She ran away on me."

"Mebbe she was chust a little backward," suggested Noah. "If you would 've went after her now . . ."

"She didn't shut the door," Simeon remembered.

"Women are queer," said Noah, reading a page out of his own experience with the sex, "and every woman is somehow different. They make a lot of bother for us men, being like they are, but we don't go far in this world without them, do we now, Simeon?"

A radiant smile stole slowly over Simeon's face. Hope was revived. "Ach, we must have them," he said. "If only I would 've known that she wanted me to run after her." He was walking now at Noah's side towards the house.

Sarah and Lydia stood waiting in the front room. The candles were sputtering in their sockets, but they emitted enough light to reveal the triumph of the older woman, the blushing reticence of the younger.

The two men entered the room. A dead silence ensued.

Then Sarah took matters in her own hands. "The

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way you two ran apart, you'd think you had the cholera," she said.

"They're in luf, ain't they, Sarai?" interjected Noah. He kept shifting his weight nervously from one foot to the other.

"They must be if *you* could see it," Sarah replied, tartly. It was evident that she wanted no further interruptions from that quarter. She turned her attention again to the young people. "We can all see you luf each other," she said. "But you didn't say so yet. Speak up, Lydy. You was the first to run."

"Leave them be," interposed Noah. "Leave them do it their own way."

"Leave them be!" cried Sarah, in derision. It was a "dumm idea", she said. Hadn't they run away once? It would be the easiest thing in the world to do so again. She kept shoving the girl gently but firmly in Simeon's direction.

Lydia lifted her eyes presently and looked shyly at her lover, but the words which failed her were supplied by her mother. "She lufs you, Simeon. She lufs you so much she can't say it."

The three great universal words stuck in Simeon's throat, too, but he advanced to Lydia's side, took her small hand in his great manly one and smiled ecstatically into her eyes.

"Now you're promised," Sarah informed them. "In this room me and Nooi was promised, too. But we didn't act up so, did we, Nooi?"

"You was different to Lydy," replied Noah. The

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grandfather clock began to chime the hour. "Nine o'clock already. Time for old folks like us to be in bed."

Sarah watched the happy pair retreat to the same end of the long bench behind the table, and then she withdrew reluctantly to the bedroom. Behind the closed door she indulged an itching ear. It was a bold, unmaidenly speech she thought she heard Lydia make; "Do you want to hold something of mine now?" Simeon's answer was incomprehensible, to say the least; "Well, all right, so long as it ain't only your cat." Whispered confidences followed, too low for Sarah's eavesdropping ears, and long silences with occasional giggles interspersed. A holy, happy time.

* * * *

When the blossoms of spring had come again and the birds were mating in the trees, Lydia's "austyer" was ready. Simeon took it over one day to the nest that the Ernsts had fitted out for the pair in one end of their large house. It was all that could be desired. There was a place for everything. Then on the most glorious day of all the springtime, Bishop Benjamin Eby paid another visit to the Horsts, and in the presence of as many friends and relatives as could be packed into the house, he made Simeon and Lydia man and wife. It was his pleasure, he said, to join in the holy bonds of matrimony the hands of those whose hearts the good Lord had already united with the cords of love.

CHAPTER IV

Ephraim and His Job

EPHRAIM was working ten hours a day now with August Schwartzentruber, the village bookbinder. He had established himself at last on the bottom rung of a lucrative trade, and his ultimate happiness and prosperity seemed assured in the calling of his choice.

It had meant no little sacrifice on the part of the Horsts to let Ephraim have his way. He would continue to eat three meals a day at the family board, and for years to come he would bring next to nothing into the family treasury. Besides, it was not a bookbinder the Horsts needed, but a pair of hands to work on the farm. It seemed unprofitable and unnecessary to pay a hired man to do the work which should naturally devolve upon a son of the house.

Manassah was fortunate, however, in finding a promising substitute for the brother who had deserted him and the farm. Levi Gingerich was his name. He could scarcely be called a hired man, for he was only sixteen, though he had a supple, sinewy body and a will to work. From earliest childhood Levi had been an orphan, his parents having been buried in the same grave after the terrible cholera epidemic of 1834. He was just emerging out of the chrysalis of charity and

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beginning to try his wings. Manassah came upon him at this opportune time and gave him the chance to earn his own bread and butter, and a little jam besides.

All went well until one day August Schwartzentruber apprised Noah that Ephraim wasn't giving satisfaction at the bindery. He was sorry he had taken him.

"But with books," stammered the disconcerted father. "We thought he would work with them."

"He won't work with nothin'," declared the irate bookbinder. "He's lazy. If I would leave him read all day long, yes, but that I won't do. How would I get my work done?"

Noah had to admit that the boy Ephraim wasn't "so great with his hands as with his head." His health wasn't good, either. He had taken him to Dr. Scott on one occasion, only to learn that he had a "flirtation" of the heart.

"He didn't get that with me," said the bookbinder. "Out on the street, mebbe. I don't leave no girls in my shop. You can take him and his flirtation home again. Give him the buck-saw. That will cure him."

"Palpitation, that's what the doctor said he had—palpitation of the heart." Noah was glad to be able to correct himself and to uphold his son's reputation in a quarter where he was held in such utter disrepute.

"Doc. Scott can say all the big words he likes," replied Schwartzentruber. "Flirtation or palpitation, or what not all. I can say a big one, too. He's an

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abomination, that's what he is. I won't have the likes of him around."

Noah walked away in meditative silence. He had a private conference with Ephraim that evening when he returned from the bindery. The boy confessed that the work was not to his liking. It bored him to sit on a hard bench all day long, turning endless pages—collating, August, his boss, called it. The needle gouged holes in his fingertips when he was stitching, and he loathed the smell of the glue.

"But you said you want to work with books."

"I do, yes," replied the boy. But it was an aggravation, he found, to handle books that he could not read.

"You can read to home," his father reminded him.

Ephraim enumerated the books on the family bookshelf, the Bible, the Hymn-book, the Almanac and *The Martyrs' Mirror*. "I've read all of them I want to," he said.

Noah was scandalized. He offered to buy a copy of the *Pilgrim's Progress*.

"That I have read already."

"Where?"

"From Simeon I lent it."

"So? The Life of Bunyan, then," suggested the disturbed father. "I haven't any money to waste on books, but bad ones you must not read."

"I lent that one from Simeon, too."

At this moment a bright idea occurred to Noah. August Schwartzentruber was a reasonable man, he

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was sure. If Ephraim would promise to work faithfully during the day, he might be induced to allow his apprentice to take a book home from time to time to read at night. He must have an interesting collection in various stages of repair. "And what you can lend off him," said Noah, "I don't have to buy."

Ephraim saw great possibilities in this proposal. He went to the bookbinder with apologies and fair promises, and had himself reinstated in the bindery. He made a solemn mental resolve never again to read during working hours. After a week of probation he might perhaps venture to ask Schwartzenruber for the privilege of taking one of the books home over night.

Temptation followed on the very heels of this laudable resolution. The next day there was brought to the bindery for repairs a large, illustrated book on Japan. Ephraim's heart bounded—a palpitation, no doubt. As soon as the bookbinder's back was turned, Ephraim seized the book and opened it. It haunted him all day long. He read what little he could by stealth and in snatches. It was wonderful—wonderful. Before him, on the pages of that book, lay a new world, a marvellous fairy-land, inhabited by strange but charming people, with narrow, slanting eyes and straight, black hair. How strangely they dressed, and such queer vehicles as they used to carry each other about. Like wheelbarrows, they were, and yet wholly different. Ephraim's brain fairly buzzed

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with the discovery he had made. It wouldn't let him think about anything else.

Closing time came. The young apprentice put on his coat and hat, wished his employer a perfunctory good-night, and started for home. But he soon retraced his steps, opened the door of the bindery and peeped in.

"What's wrong, now?" said the bookbinder. He always watched Ephraim's movements with suspicion.

"If I could have that book about Chapan . . ."

"What?"

"That Chapan book."

"Such a book I haven't got," declared Schwartzen-truber.

But Ephraim knew he had. "The big one that you got this morning already," he explained. "The one with the pitchers in."

"Pitchers," growled the bookbinder. "How do you know what books have pitchers?"

"I looked once," confessed Ephraim. "If I could take it with me home. . ."

"Take it home?" The scowl faded from the bookbinder's face and gave place to a smile of satisfaction. "You want to stitch it?" he said. "So you will make good the time you have wasted by me? Ach, well, then, you can take it."

"I want to read it." Ephraim's tender conscience compelled him to acknowledge in all candour.

Schwartzentruber threw up his hands in disapproving amazement. "Read it!" he exclaimed.

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"Readin' is for rich folks that has time to waste, and not for bookbinders that has to earn their bread and butter."

At the first intimation of consent Ephraim had clutched the coveted treasure. He stuck it under his arm and hurried out of the bindery lest his employer should change his mind. He was well upon his way home when he heard, or thought he heard, the stentorian tones of his master's voice calling to him in vain from the work-shop window.

That was an outstanding night in Ephraim's life history. With a candle sputtering away on the kitchen table, and with his mother sputtering protests from her bed in the adjoining room, the boy sat oblivious to the limitations of time and space. He was off on the wings of his imagination to far-away Japan. Strange people surrounded him. They fascinated him with their picturesque attire and with their novel customs. One minute he was in a house eating rice with chopsticks; the next he was riding through the narrow, crowded streets of Tokyo in a jinriksha drawn by a human horse, or winding his way along country roads to catch a glimpse of Fujiyama, the sacred mountain. It was all so entrancing.

One chapter of the book disturbed Ephraim's peace of mind and cast a gloom over the beautiful picture he had created. A terrible canker had eaten its way, it seemed, into the hearts of these charming people of beautiful Japan. On every hand were to be seen the open sores of their sin. The people were

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enveloped in the darkness of heathendom, in honour they were unstable, in morals, degenerate. With no knowledge of the Light of the World, they groped about, following blindly a dim, religious instinct. They built huge temples, but in them they bowed down to gods of wood and stone. Oh, the pity of it! By the roadside of life they lay wounded, dying, and Christendom saw, but like the Levite, passed by, unheeding, on the other side.

In the morning Ephraim carried the book with him to the bindery, and registered a mental decision to show his gratitude to the bookbinder by applying himself diligently to his trade. But when Schwartzentruber went out, as he usually did in the morning, "on business", the young apprentice promptly forgot his worthy resolution, and gravitated over to that corner of the room where the magnetic volume lay on its shelf. Away he was again, far, far away in the enchanted islands of Japan.

Suddenly a step sounded upon the stair. Ephraim started and came back in the twinkling of an eye to the bindery. He banged the book shut. It fell noisily upon the floor. Confused with guilt and trembling with apprehension, he turned to face the angry Schwartzentruber, whose bulky figure seemed already to overshadow him.

It was a strange voice that spoke. "Where's the boss?"

Ephraim looked up to see Mr. Collins, the new grammar school teacher, a man of like generous pro-

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portions to his employer, but unlike him in that he was genial and without authority in the bindery. Ephraim presumed to pick up the book before answering. He placed it again upon its shelf.

"Where's the boss?" This time the strange voice was loud and imperious.

"He's out for his beer," replied Ephraim, with the candour characteristic of his race. "If I can do anything for you. . ."

Mr. Collins did not seem to be listening. He had walked over to the big book, and he began to leaf it over, page by page. Presently he looked up and said, "You like to read?"

Ephraim acknowledged rather shamefacedly that he did. Whether at home or at work, reading seemed to be with him a sort of guilty indulgence at which he was forever being caught.

"Have you read Shakespeare?"

The boy shook his head. He thought he had heard of him, though.

"Virgil? Cicero? Livy? Tacitus?"

Even the names fell strangely on Ephraim's ears. They didn't sound like Jeremiah, Isaiah, Amos and Obadiah.

Mr. Collins smiled kindly. "You don't know Latin, then?" he said.

"Latin?" replied the lad. "Who's he?"

Mr. Collins patted Ephraim on the shoulder. "It's not a man I mean, my boy," he said, "but a language—a language not spoken to-day, but one which forms

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the basis of many of our modern tongues. You can't get very far without Latin."

Ephraim's eyes opened wide with wonder.

"It's the greatest language the world has ever known," continued Mr. Collins, encouraged by the boy's evident interest, "and the study of it is a most profitable stimulus to education and culture."

Ephraim kept staring harder and harder.

"You see, my boy, I teach it at the school. I measure minds by Latin," Mr. Collins went on to say. "Latin isn't exactly what you might call easy, but it is decidedly worth while. The boy that can master one little book, the 'Latin Grammar', can be whatever he wants to be in this world."

Ephraim stood and gaped. Just at that moment the bookbinder walked into the shop and ordered him summarily to work.

"I've been talking to him," said the teacher, nodding in the direction of Ephraim's bench.

"I talk to him, too," was the answer; "but it don't do no good. He won't work."

"Boys will be boys," returned the teacher. "I've had a lot to do with them, and I've found that some of the worst turn out to be the best."

The fat German shook with laughter. "That's Irish," he said. "That's what you call a choke."

"It's the truth," declared Mr. Collins. "If a boy won't work, there must be something wrong."

"With him it's laziness."

"There's something wrong with his work, I mean."

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"Bookbindin' is a good chob." Schwartzentruber was on the defensive.

"For you, yes, but perhaps not for him. It may be he's one that was meant to work with his head, not with his hands. We are not all made alike, you know."

Ephraim's heart warmed to Mr. Collins. All day long he kept thinking of their conversation, and as soon as the day's work was done, he put on his hat and went out to find the man who had inspired him with a new hope.

The teacher was at the supper table with his wife and children when Ephraim knocked at the door. It was a dainty little room into which the boy stumbled, a room adorned, quite unlike his own Mennonite home, with curtains and other furbelows dear to the hearts of the women of the world. The boy became suddenly conscious of his hands and feet. His broad-rimmed hat continued to rest undisturbed upon the roofs of his ears. "You said you had such a book," he panted.

For his life Mr. Collins couldn't think what book it could be that the bookbinder wanted. There must have been some misunderstanding, he thought.

"It's not for him," Ephraim explained. "It's me. You said if I could learn it, I could be what I want to be in the world." He was flustered and woefully self-conscious.

"The 'Latin Grammar', Agnes," said the teacher.

"What are you going to make out of this one?" said the woman, smiling blandly.

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"Whatever he wants to be. Give him a new book, Agnes."

The woman brought the book and Mr. Collins gave it to Ephraim. "Come to-morrow at half-past seven," he said, "and I'll give you a start."

Ephraim gulped. He had expected, of course, to pay for the book. At that very moment he had enough money in his pocket to buy a dozen 'Latin Grammars', but for the life of him he didn't know how to offer it. All he could do was to stammer incoherent thanks.

That evening Ephraim went over to Manassah's to show him his new book and to tell him of his educational prospects. But he did not succeed in evoking any great enthusiasm from his rather phlegmatic brother. "It seems you ain't satisfied yet," said Manassah.

"No, I ain't."

"Didn't we do enough for you yet? We let you off the farm."

"Yes, but . . ."

"And we got you a chob with books like you wanted. We had to hire so you could go. But you—you won't work no place."

Ephraim hung his head. It was the inside of books he wanted, he tried to explain. "If I could only read . . . chust read. . ."

"Reading is not working," Manassah told him. "You'll lose your chob with your foolish reading."

"But a bookbinder I will not be."

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"The trouble with you is, Ephraim, you don't know what you will be."

"I do," protested the boy.

"Well, then, what will you be?"

"If I could be a missionary . . ."

"A missionary! Whatever!" exclaimed Manassah. "None of us people ever went for a missionary yet."

"No."

"Do you want to go and live with the Indians?"

"I feel to go to Chapan," said Ephraim.

"To Chapan, yet!" cried Manassah, aghast. "You learned that out of the book that you lent from the shop."

Ephraim admitted it. Ever since he had read that wonderful book he had been fascinated by Japan and its people. He felt a call to go to them with the open Bible and the Christian faith.

Manassah refused to be unduly excited about the irreligion of a distant, foreign nation. There were plenty of heathen in Ebytown, he declared. They didn't have to go outside their own meeting-house to find people who disregarded their solemn promises, hated their neighbours, and worshipped only their household goods or their landed property. "If you feel to preach, you can preach here," he said. "It says in the Bible you must start first in Jerusalem."

"But we must go to Judea, too, and to the uttermost parts of the earth," was Ephraim's rebuttal. "That means to Chapan."

The following evening Ephraim went for his first

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lesson in Latin. It was all very strange, very different from the English and the German with which he was familiar, and Mr. Collins warned him that it would be increasingly difficult as they progressed. But Ephraim had some determination. Having at last found a plough to his liking, neither Manassah's apathy nor the prospect of unforeseen snags in the thorny path that leads to mental culture would suffice to make him look back. Mr. Collins chuckled. Here was a student after his own heart.

Wherever he went, Ephraim carried with him in a convenient pocket his precious 'Latin Grammar'. If he had a few minutes of solitude at home, he whisked it out and conned over the conjugations. He learned his vocabularies walking to and from the shop. Even during working hours there were moments when he could study, out of range of the bookbinder's watchful eye. He hit upon the ingenious device of setting the book up on the back of a chair, so that he might read and work at the same time. He had an uneasy conscience, however, on this point.

One day it happened that Schwartzentruber came upon the boy in one of these moments of dissipated interest. He had caught Ephraim at his old tricks, he thought. He would "learn" him. He seized the book exultantly! It was not one that had been brought into the bindery for repairs. He demanded to know whose it was.

"Mine," replied Ephraim, without looking up. He was too ashamed to look anywhere.

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"There it goes," said the bookbinder, and he shied the book contemptuously across the room.

It happened that the day was chilly and, following Schwartzentruber's instructions, Ephraim had built a fire in the little box stove, and he had left the door open for a draught. Whether by intention or by an unlucky chance, the book struck the hole and the flames leaped up to catch it. Ephraim plunged to rescue it, but it was gone. There stood the corpulent Schwartzentruber, smiling grimly as he turned the pages with the poker to make sure that it should be irreparably burned.

Ephraim was furious. One moment he had a mad impulse to strike the bully in the inflated portion of his anatomy under his belt, the next moment he wanted to sit down and bawl out his rage. Finally, he snatched his hat and rushed out into the street.

"There you can stop," the bookbinder called after him. "Long enough I have kept you already. You can go home and tell Nooi you ain't no good of a bookbinder."

So Ephraim lost his job. Just what it would mean for him he dared not conjecture. Forlornly he paced the streets until school was out, and then he sought Mr. Collins and told him of his misfortunes.

The teacher was full of censure for Ephraim. It was wrong of him to study during working hours against the wishes of his employer. But the bookbinder was wrong, too. He had no right to destroy the property of another, and anyway, books were much

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too valuable to be burned, filled, as they are, with useful learning. Ephraim must pay for another copy of the 'Grammar', and the lessons which had been so auspiciously begun were to continue in spite of this little interruption, provided, of course, that Ephraim's parents raised no objection.

"Do you think they will let you come?" Mr. Collins asked.

Ephraim had to confess that he had not consulted his parents about his studies. Manassah he had told, but he had bound him to secrecy.

"Tell them to-night," advised Mr. Collins. "Not another lesson will I give you without the consent of your father."

Things had come to a climax. Not only must he impart to an unsympathetic family circle the distressing news of his dismissal, but he must also confess his unholy thirst for a worldly education.

The storm had already broken when the boy reached home. An ominous silence reigned when he entered the room. His father's face was long and solemn. "Ephraim," he said, "we know already."

His mother turned upon him in anger. "That's what you get with your book-readin'," she stormed. "It serves you right."

"What book was it?" asked Noah, quietly.

Ephraim hesitated, but finally stated that it was the 'Latin Grammar'.

"Latin," cried Noah, in wild alarm. "How long are you readin' books with the pope's language?"

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"Three weeks."

"Three weeks! Latin!" shrieked Sarah. "Three weeks runnin' with the Cath'lics already, and us not knowin' about it!" She was ready to go into hysterics.

"Ain't you satisfied with the religion we gave you?" asked Noah, reproachfully.

Ephraim tried to explain that the Latin Grammar had no connection with the Roman faith. Moreover, his teacher, Mr. Collins, was a Protestant. Their fears were groundless.

"And why must you run to this Mr. Collins?" said Noah, in an aggrieved tone. "Ain't I good enough to give you advice?"

The boy's reply was in the affirmative, but it lacked the enthusiasm the father had hoped to hear.

"What will you do now?" Sarah wanted to know. "Must we look you out another chob?"

"If you would leave me go to grammar school," ventured Ephraim.

"To grammar school yet!" It was a new idea for Sarah. Cyrus was to go some day, she had planned, but Ephraim was different. She hadn't intended to spend so much money on him.

"Ephraim's got more brains than Cyrus," interposed Esther.

"Whether who's got the most brains is not the question," was Sarah's scathing reply. "We didn't ask you for your ideas. It don't look like you have many brains."

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"Tee-hee!" sneered Cyrus. "Dummkopf!" It was Esther he meant, of course.

The solution of the vexed problem of the disposition of Ephraim came a few days later from an unexpected quarter when Manassah pronounced himself in favour of sending the boy to grammar school. The family would be money in pocket, he declared, if they kept him off the farm. He was "no good of a farmer". It would be next to impossible to get another job for him in the village now that the bookbinder had informed all Ebytown what a good-for-nothing scamp Ephraim was. "He won't work with his hands," said Manassah. "Try him once with his head."

"But what will he make at the end?" asked Noah, who found it hard to overcome his prejudices against this higher education.

Manassah nudged Ephraim. "Tell him," he said.

So Ephraim straightened himself up and declared that it was the purpose of his life to become a missionary to Japan.

This was something new for the Horsts to digest. They did not know precisely what they thought about missions. The problem of the great heathen world was not one of the many theological themes which had been discussed during those lovefeasts they had all enjoyed when Simeon Ernst was courting Lydia. But they didn't need Simeon to tell them that Ephraim had at least set before himself a worthy ideal.

Noah, however, was not a little disturbed because his son seemed to be imbued with the worldly idea that

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a secular education is essential to the successful preaching of the gospel. This was contrary to all Mennonite tradition. "Religion is not in the head," he told the boy. "You can't read it out of books. If it's real, it will bubble up like a well in the heart. Have you got the heart religion, Ephraim?"

"Yes," replied the boy, "that I have, but I want it in the head, too."

"Then watch out you don't lose it all," was Noah's word of warning. He knew the silent power of a worldly environment; he feared for his children.

Manassah was disposed to be more hopeful about the matter and more liberal in his views. "We are all different," he reminded his father. "If we think at all, we can't all think alike. We can't make laws for each other. What's our conscience for?"

CHAPTER V

Esther Meets the World

ESTHER'S school life was of brief duration. She had scarcely more than started at Eby's red school-house when her mother decided that it was more essential that the child's hands should become proficient in the use of kitchen utensils than that her head should be stored with the useless lumber of a book education.

With Cyrus, of course, it was vastly different. He was a boy, the doting mother's favourite son, a notable man in the making. He had a greater capacity for, and a greater need of learning. So Cyrus continued to trudge his weary way to the school-house long after his sister had graduated into the kitchen to assume the cloak of responsibility which had so lately fallen from Lydia's shoulders.

Esther soon became her mother's right arm, as it were. She milked, she cooked, she sewed. She did a myriad other duties which fall to the lot of the housekeeper. Sarah usually stood by to oversee the work and to give ample and detailed instructions. Any deviation from the beaten path which the mother had trod in the daily routine of her own household activities for more than a score of years, was remarked. It was the old skimmer that was to be used in the soap-

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making, the black-handled knife for peeling the potatoes, and the little sharp one for "schnitzing" the apples. Of all the awkward ways to hold knitting needles! Would the child never learn?

Even when Sarah seemed not to know her own mind, she did not forbear to issue her orders. If Esther should happen to be pumping a pailful of water, she might expect to hear her mother tap authoritatively on the window-pane and say, "You can stop now." The pumping would cease abruptly, but not the woman's voice. "Do I have to learn you yet not to waste the water?" The child would lift the pail, only to receive a new command, "Give it a couple more cherks. It ain't full yet." And the pumping would continue to the mother's shrill obligato, "Watch out that it comes chust right. I want to learn you good."

Esther was a very human little girl, and the incessant, petty commands of her mother irritated her exceedingly. If this was housekeeping, she hated it. She wanted to do things in her own way, but she was compelled to do them according to the rules handed down, together with the china, the pewter, and the household linens, from some maternal great-grandmother. A thousand times she wished she had been born a boy, so that she might go to school and choose for herself some interesting niche in life. A thousand useless squalls of rebellion there were, against an uncompromising fate. Never could she be anything

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else than a woman, and, in one capacity or another, a housekeeper.

It was one of Esther's duties to make the beds in the morning. Of all the work that came to her hands she liked that best. She had a happy knack of smoothing out a feather tick as level as a board, and covering it with sheets and patchwork quilts in their proper order. This one duty she was allowed to perform without supervision, for Sarah found it difficult to climb the stairs and usually contented herself with a tour of inspection of the rooms once or twice a week.

But Esther liked the upstairs work chiefly because it afforded her an opportunity to indulge in a surreptitious peep at Ephraim's books. There were always some that he was not using at school, and these he kept piled neatly on a wall shelf in his room. On the fly-leaf of each was inscribed the full name of the owner, Ephraim Wismer Horst, and the date of purchase.

On one occasion Esther was fortunate enough to discover among these books a copy of that magical volume, the 'Latin Grammar'. It was interesting, to be sure, but she found it disappointingly uninforming. It was only when she looked for Ephraim's signature that she found in its stead an inscription full of significant information. "Levi Stauffer Gingerich," it read, "from E.W.H. With best wishes."

No matter who actually owned the books, they were Esther's for the time being. Having whisked the bed-clothes into their proper places, she would

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select one of the volumes, squat upon the floor, and begin to pore over her treasure. Not a sound in all the upstairs but the occasional turning of a page. Tick-tock, the grandfather clock downstairs would reproach her, but Esther would be off and away in the chariot of her imagination, riding through vapoury clouds into a great, unknown world, where time and space do not count. A creak at the stairway door, however, was always sufficient to bring the young reader to earth again. With a guilty start she would scramble to her feet and stick the book back into its place on the shelf. Suddenly she would become very busy.

"Ain't you done yet, Esther?" her mother would be sure to call. "You are makin' awful slow with them beds this morning."

"I'm chust done," Esther would reply, practising, perhaps half-unconsciously, the insidious art of deception, while she bustled about the room readjusting perfectly well-adjusted pillows and running her hand over the smooth surface of the topmost quilt. "I'm done now."

"Why you must hurry so with everything else and poke with the beds is more than I know," Sarah told her young daughter morning after morning. "You'll never get a good house-keeper, never, with all the learning I give you."

Esther was nearly fifteen years of age when her mother decided that she was mature enough to be entrusted with the family shopping. Accordingly, she

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told the girl one day to take two shilling crocks of butter from the spring-house and to count out three dozen eggs into the big basket—"not the one with the crooked handle, the other one". She was to go for the first time, alone, to Bomberger's store in the village, and there exchange her produce for such commodities as were not native to the farm. The tea was "all", and the sugar was "gettin' all". She wanted two pounds of each, green and brown, and the balance in due-bills. "Now, tell me what it is I want," she commanded.

"Two pounds of tea, one green and one brown . . .," began Esther.

"Tut! Tut! It's the sugar that's to be brown," said Sarah. "I might as well write it down first as last. Then I know what I will get. If you are so dumm here, what won't you be like yet in the store with strangers?"

Esther did not know. She was vaguely conscious that this was to be for her no ordinary expedition.

"Now what dress had I best wear on you?" soliloquized the mother, when all was ready but Esther's little self. "The black one with the stripes," she decided. "The one that I've got one like it."

It was Esther's second best dress, and it seemed fitting that she should wear it on such an auspicious occasion. Not only was the material like her mother's, a sombre black lustre, with a fine gray stripe, but it had been cut, like all her dresses, from the same pattern. The waist was scant and plain, with a high neck

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and with long, skin-tight sleeves. The skirt was ankle-length, full and ungored. The only difference was that Sarah's costume included an apron of the same cloth, while Esther's was made of bright blue gingham.

The girl was thrilled with the prospect of a new adventure. Her heart was as light as her basket was heavy. She knew that behind the counter would be standing a certain very agreeable young man, who always had an affable greeting and an engaging smile for his customers. "Good morning, Mrs. Horst," he always called, as soon as her mother entered the store. "It's a fine day." Esther couldn't help wondering how he would greet her. He was such a handsome, happy young man.

But when the girl crossed the threshold of the store, filled as she was with joyous anticipation, the very agreeable clerk did not so much as notice her. His attention was divided between a pretty girl of Esther's own age and a set of spring scales with which he was weighing the groceries she had ordered. "A little better than a pound," he was saying. "Good measure, because it's you."

"Silly," replied the unknown girl, shrugging a shapely shoulder. "It's my mother that's buying it. You didn't forget the butter, did you? Horsts', she wants, so that she knows it's clean."

"Horsts'?" said the clerk. "Here it is, chust on time." He reached over the counter for Esther's basket. "Good afternoon, Miss Horst."

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Miss-Horst! Nobody had ever called her that before. She forgot to drop a sedate "Good-day", as her mother always did. Instead she stammered out, "It's a fine day."

Having been cheated out of his pet remark, the very agreeable young man had nothing further to say.

An even greater embarrassment confronted Esther the next minute. The girl who stood at the counter, a very rainbow for beauty of face and apparel, was holding out her hand and saying, "So you are Esther Horst. I'm Rhoda Starling. I know your brother."

"Which one?"

"Ephraim, the one that goes to grammar school."

It was a very dainty hand, and Esther had some compunctions about taking it into her own very muscular one. She could not believe that Ephraim knew this airy-fairy creature. In a blundering sort of way she intimated as much, though she did not mean to be rude.

The charming Rhoda was not at all disconcerted. She laughed merrily and acknowledged that she had not actually spoken to Ephraim, but that she had seen him so often that she felt she knew him.

Esther wanted to say something, she did not know what.

Rhoda became increasingly friendly. "Mr. Collins says Ephraim is the smartest boy he ever knew," she confided. "Some day he'll be a Member of Parliament."

Esther shook her head. "That he won't be, with

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all his smartness," she said. "It don't go with our religion."

"What?"

"Polly-ticks," answered Esther. "Us Mennonites must stop out of the world."

Yes, between the two girls there was a great gulf fixed. Esther knew it instinctively, but she was disposed to feel kindly towards Rhoda, on whose lips the praise of her brother sounded so sweet.

"Something else?" the clerk ventured to interpose. He had been standing on alternate feet ever since he had transferred Esther's shilling crock of butter to the pile of groceries to be delivered at Starling's back door.

"Yes, coffee—a pound."

"Ground?"

"Ground? No, coffee, I said."

"But do you want it ground? Will I grind it?"

"Grind it?" exclaimed Rhoda. "What for? Don't you think we have a coffee-mill of our own?"

The clerk was somewhat taken back. "Some likes it ground," he explained. "Mrs. Dr. Scott . . ."

That settled it. Rhoda would have it ground. She turned again to Esther and continued her eulogy of Ephraim, while the slighted clerk repaired to a stool in the corner and manipulated the noisy coffee-mill between his knees. A pleasing aroma filled the store.

When the sound of the grinding had ceased, Rhoda looked over her shoulder and said, "That's all. She wants them by five o'clock."

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Esther's eyes opened wide. "Must he fetch them to your place yet?" she inquired.

"Of course."

"Put them in my basket," she suggested. "There'll be room yet. We can carry them."

"Those that will carry, can," was Rhoda's epigrammatic reply, as she walked away.

Esther tried to digest the philosophy of this remark while the clerk was emptying her basket and filling it again with sugar and tea, according to Sarah's explicit instructions.

"I'd take them to your place, too, if it wasn't so far," said the affable clerk, as he handed her the basket over the counter.

Esther was fairly bewildered by his expansive smile. "Ach, I can carry it," she managed to say. "It ain't so far."

So preoccupied were the girl's thoughts that she almost forgot to drop in at her grandfather's on her way home. Somewhere in the bottom of her basket was a parcel which Sarah was sending to her father. Esther found it, walked around to the back door, entered without knocking, and deposited the gift upon the kitchen table.

"A char of cream!" cried Aunt Leah, joyfully. "A char of cream from the farm yet! That will go good to the shoo-fly pie we've got for supper."

"Are you cold, grossdoddy?" asked Esther, approaching the old man who sat in his black armchair,

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fairly hugging the stove in the front room, June and all, as it was, and hotter than Dutch love.

"Cold? No."

"He's chust got himself into such a habit," Leah explained. "All winter he sets there like that to keep warm, and now he can't set no place else. But, so, he it out of the way." This, with resignation. "Wait once till I put the cream in the cellar, so it don't go sour on me."

When Leah returned, Esther was telling her grandfather what she had carried to the store and what she had bought. "Tea and sugar, two pounds, green and brown," she said. "She wrote it on a paper."

"A big girl like you, and she had to write it down yet?" said Grossdoddy.

"It was the first time," pleaded Esther.

"And who waited on you?" queried Leah.

Esther did not know his name.

"Gideon?"

"The smiley one," Esther called him.

"That's him, Gideon," said Leah. "Lizzie Bomberger's boy, that his father owns the store. Didn't mamma know him even?"

Esther didn't think so.

"Why, Lizzie and her used to play together when they was little yet," Leah went on to say. "Lizzie was Lizzie Musselman then, and Sarah was Sarah Wismer. That was long before you was thought about, or Gideon either. And if they couldn't fight! But Liz-

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zie's went long already with the black diphtheria. It don't do to run her down now."

Esther found an opportunity to insert a few words of commendation of Lizzie's son. He seemed so pleasant and agreeable, certainly not quarrelsome. If it hadn't been so far, he would have carried her basket home. So he must be obliging.

Grossdoddy Wismer pricked up his ears. "Are you sick," he said, "that you can't carry for yourself?"

"No," replied Esther, "but Gideon chust felt to be polite."

Grossdoddy disapproved of this form of politeness. "Are you a queen that somebody must chump for you?" he wanted to know.

"Rhoda Starling left him carry hers home," Esther replied in self-defence.

"Big-bugs," sniffed Leah. It was not a very euphonious word, but it evidently covered a multitude of offences. "Don't you go runnin' with them Starlings yet. They have everything big but their purses, big notions, big tongues, big. . ."

"See that your own ain't too big," came a timely admonition from the armchair. Grossdoddy was ready to defend the Starlings. Had Leah forgotten that Susannah Starling's father was a Weber from Pennsylvania?

"It's them that wants to forget," retorted Leah. "The girls and Sarah yet. They want to be English, like him—her man." She knew the Starlings.

Grossdoddy could not credit it. A little worldly,

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the young ones might be, perhaps, like apples rotted on the surface, but sound at heart, he was sure. He could conceive of nothing so sad as to see sons and daughters grow up to be unworthy of a noble ancestry.

Esther had an uncomfortable feeling that there were seeds of thought in this conversation calculated to fall upon fertile ground and bear fruit a hundred fold. She decided that she must go home and help prepare the supper.

"Thank you for the wisit," said the old man, when she went to offer him her hand. "And come again when it suits."

"Tell Sarah thank you for the cream," added Leah, following Esther to the door. "I miss cream something awful. She knows that, I guess. Well, good-bye. Mebbe till to-morrow or the next day I'll come down once. Tell mamma."

No sooner was the child out of the house than there rushed into Leah's mind a flood of questions she had meant to ask at the first opportunity. She had forgotten, but it wasn't too late yet. She hurried to the front door and called Esther back.

The girl retraced her steps as far as the stoop.

"Is Lydy's quilt done yet?"

"Yes, yesterday we finished it already."

"And will Manassah have enough hands for the hayin'?"

"He has a hired man now."

"Yes, but will he work? There is hired men and hired men."

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"Mannie says he is more worth on the farm than two like Ephraim," was the reply.

"That don't say much," sniffed Leah. The tragic story of her nephew's disinclination to manual labour had evidently come to her ears without deletion. "What's his name, this hired man?"

"Levi Gingerich."

"Him? The orphant?"

"Yes, from the cholera. They went all dead with it but him."

"I mind the time yet," said Leah. "But Levi I didn't see yet this long time."

That was strange, Esther thought. On Saturday evening when it rained he had been to the village. He must have passed the house.

"There was a stranger went by," Leah remembered. "It worried me something awful to think who he was."

"That was him."

"But he was mumbling something like as if he might be a little out of his head."

Esther laughed. He was learning his Latin, of course.

"Latin!" shrieked Leah. "He took that from Ephraim." It might have been a contagious disease. "Latin!"

"Ephraim helps him."

"Spoils him, you mean. Must Levi learn Latin to be a hired man chust? Look at Manassah. He ain't so crazy, and he's a good farmer."

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"Mebbe Levi don't feel to be a hired man always," suggested Esther.

"What else can he be? He won't get nothing with his folks."

"No," agreed Esther, "but if he can learn his 'Latin Grammar' good to the end of the book, he can be whatever he sets his mind on to be."

Aunt Leah stood and gaped.

"Ephraim said."

That was Ephraim, and a sample of his nonsensical theories. Was that what he learned at the grammar school? It was as childish as chasing birds all day hoping to catch one by sprinkling a handful of salt on its tail. If Manassah wasn't careful, he would have two bird-chasers on the farm.

"Mannie knows about the Latin," put in Esther.

But Leah paid no attention. She was off on a tirade of indignation on modern life and ideas. "That's the way it goes these days," she said. "Anything but work. To be all day in a big armchair, or in a store with soft clothes on. Anything but the farm! Chapen even! What's the world comin' to? That's what I want to know."

Esther could not enlighten her. She wondered vaguely, too, about the big world and its destiny, but her interest was centred in the little corner of the universe which included only herself and a few others.

Notwithstanding Aunt Leah's earnest admonition, there sprang up in the days that followed, an ardent friendship between the little Mennonite and the "big-

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bug" Starling girl. Instead of ordering the butter from the store, Rhoda came now once a week direct to the Horsts' for it, and not infrequently the errand lengthened into a somewhat protracted visit. Esther entertained her guest in her favourite nook in the branches of an apple-tree which stood near the kitchen door. There they had their sanctuary, told secrets and exchanged confidences, while the inconsequential butter was left to melt its life away on the doorstep in the sun.

It was Rhoda who dropped into the garden of Esther's character a tiny seed of worldliness. The little Mennonite girl was fully aware that the great St. Paul had expressly forbidden the wearing of gold and costly apparel, but these were the very things that made Rhoda seem the most charming girl she had ever known. She admired everything that Rhoda wore, from her bright hair-ribbon to her dainty shoes, the pretty dress, the pantalets underneath—everything. But above all else, she adored the ring that Rhoda wore alternately on her two great fingers.

"Is it gold?" she asked one day.

"Solid gold," was the impressive reply.

"Where did you get it?" asked Esther, with innocent curiosity.

Rhoda giggled. "I got it from a boy," she confided.

Esther's heart fairly stood still. "From a boy? Not Ephraim, I know," she said.

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"No, not him," was Rhoda's reply. "I'd give this one back pretty soon if he would give me one."

"He won't."

"Not now," Rhoda was willing to concede. "When he is a Member of Parliament," she added, hopefully. She never allowed herself—or others—to forget the brilliant career that Mr. Collins had predicted for his most promising pupil.

"Did Levi give it to you?" asked Esther, determined to steer the infatuated girl off the shoals of her favourite topic of conservation and to relieve, if possible, the concern of her own throbbing heart. What she really wanted to know was whether or not it was his ring—Gideon's.

Rhoda, of course, had no suspicion of this. She pooh-poohed the idea of Levi ever having enough money to buy anybody anything, certainly not gold rings. He was nothing but a poor orphan boy. Indeed, if Esther must know, the ring belonged to one of her many admirers from Shade's Mills, a young man of excellent family and of considerable means.

With the question of her heart answered, Esther allowed Rhoda to continue the conversation in her usual narrative style. The recital of the various social activities of the Starling family from week to week was dramatic enough to hold spellbound a greater audience than one little Mennonite girl. Once more Rhoda and her elder sister, Veronica, had upheld their reputation as the undisputed belles of the community. Their callers had been legion, and Veronica had been

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twice invited to go for a buggy-ride. Only sixteen and buggy-rides! No wonder the other girls were jealous.

The part of the rigmarole that interested Esther most was the vivid description she gave of Veronica's clothes. She tried to picture the innumerable tucks, the frills and the furbelows, and the yards and yards of lace, with here and there a bow of ribbon to cap the extravagance. It was all quite beyond Esther's powers of imagination. If only she could sometime get a peep into the gay, unknown world inhabited by the Starlings and their friends. She heaved an unconscious sigh, when her hand brushed inadvertently against her own coarse, plain, Mennonite dress.

Rhoda babbled on, but Esther did not hear. Another voice had gained her attention. It was stern and authoritative. "Be not conformed to the world, for here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. Therefore let the women adorn themselves not with gold, or pearls, or costly array, but with good works, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." A flush of guilt suffused Esther's face. She recognized the still, small voice of conscience reminding her of the spirit of her people and of the doctrines of the Mennonites. It quoted to her the very word of God.

"Ain't you Pennsylvania Dutch, too?" asked Esther, when Rhoda paused momentarily for breath.

"I don't know anything about that," said Rhoda, avoiding on a plea of ignorance what was evidently a distasteful subject. "Now I have to go."

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Esther spent much of her time thinking about the Starlings and the enchanted world that revolved about them. It was a fairy-land, mystic, wonderful. She longed to see the piano that Rhoda talked about, and the fine linen and china her mother possessed. But above everything else she wanted to see the pretty dresses of silk and velvet which adorned the fair Veronica.

An opportunity to realize this ambition came sooner than she had even dared to hope. The day after one of Rhoda's weekly visits to the Horsts', Sarah, the mother, made the startling discovery that she had overcharged Mrs. Starling for the butter. Not for the world would she have her customer think that she had done so dishonestly, so she called Esther, gave her the misappropriated money and packed her off in haste to offer Mrs. Starling the explanation and her apologies.

"Must I come right away back?" called Esther from the gate.

"Ach, you can stop a while and wisit, I guess," replied Sarah.

"And if they would ast me for supper?" Esther's hopes were rushing headlong down the broad avenue of remote possibility.

"Supper?" deliberated Sarah.

"If I could chust stop for supper once," pleaded Esther.

"Ach, well, then you can," decided Sarah. "You can stop if they ast you twict."

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Esther was confident of a warm welcome from Rhoda, and she ran off with a joyous heart. Very soon she was knocking excitedly at the Starling's kitchen door. It was Mrs. Starling who answered. Esther made the necessary explanation and returned the money, proudly conscious that she had performed her duty creditably.

Rhoda's mother was by no means effusive in her welcome. There she stood at the half-open door, looking distantly at Esther over the rims of her spectacles. This was no Mennonite greeting, but the Starlings were Methodists, Esther remembered, and different.

"It's a fine day," the girl made bold to remark. She remembered how successfully Gideon used this invariable comment on every sort of variable weather.

"Yes, it is."

"If the rain would only hold off till the hay is all in." She had often heard her mother offer Providence this suggestion.

"Yes, we've got enough rain," thought Mrs. Starling. She was receding slowly but surely into the kitchen, and the aperture through which she vouchsafed her replies was diminishing appreciably.

Esther's heart sank. The door to fairyland was all but inexorably closed when the fairy Rhoda wafted it wide open and called out cheerily, "Hello, Esther, why don't you come in?"

Esther was speechless, but Mrs. Starling was voluble. "There's all the dusting to do," she reminded

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Rhoda, "and we're getting company for supper—Shade's Mills company. And the pies are to bake, and to-morrow's bread is to set, and the dishes are to wash. . ."

"I'll help," offered Esther.

"You'll both stand around in the way and nothing done. If only you didn't come."

They compromised on the dish-washing and the dusting. That done, the girls were to be allowed to entertain each other on the verandah. But no sooner had the dishpan been put away and the kitchen door closed, to keep out the odours of the cooking, than Rhoda draped her duster over the back of a chair and planned to entertain her guest after the manner of adolescents. "Let's go to the attic," she said.

"Attics are nice," replied Esther, "if there's no mice. We have two of them."

"Two mice?"

"No, attics," corrected Esther. She related how on the first day of their residence in Ebytown she had been put into the "bettel-room" for punishment. "And ever since then," she said, "I don't go in a attic that mice don't come into my mind."

"That's too bad," said Rhoda. "We could sit on chairs like ladies, but we can do that when we are old."

"We might go upstairs," suggested Esther, with bounding heart. Timidly she intimated that she would like to see Veronica's blue velvet dress and her green silk one. She had tried so often to picture them.

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Rhoda bit her lip. "She is not home, Veronica," she said.

"But you could show them to me chust," Esther suggested.

"She's packed them in the drawer," affirmed Rhoda. "I helped her do it."

"But we could pack them in again, till we are done looking at them," Esther thought.

"She locked them up," replied Rhoda, "and she hid the key."

Esther's disappointment was keen, but Rhoda offered to place on exhibition her own Sunday dress, a pretty, white creation made of some sort of sheer material, trimmed with little groups of tiny tucks.

Esther clasped her hands in ecstasy when she saw it. "Ach, such little bunches of tucks," she cried, "and all alike apart."

Rhoda laughed pleasantly.

"If I could put it on," said Esther, holding the dress at arm's length and trying to picture herself in it.

Rhoda gave her enthusiastic consent. She helped Esther out of her sombre, Mennonite garb and into the light, fluffy, airy, white creation that the Methodist church allowed Rhoda to wear. A jerk here and a pull there, and buttons all the way up the back. "It fits you beautifully," cried the enraptured Rhoda, her voice drawling with admiration over the big word. "You look lovely, simply lovely." She clapped her

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hands in delight. Then suddenly the ecstasy died away, and she added, "Only your hair."

"Yes, my hair," said Esther. She couldn't see herself, to be sure, but she knew what her hair looked like; two hemispheres of dark brown plastered down to the contour of the head, two short pigtailed behind tied with a string of black thread. She knew, too, that it was only after many years of tangles and tears that her hair had submitted to this training.

"Let me make you some curls," begged Rhoda.

Curls! All her life Esther had wanted curls. She yielded weakly to the temptation. Rhoda undid the braids and combed the lovely hair in strands over her forefinger. Exclamations of anticipation and wonder proclaimed each curl a success. When it was all done, Esther's head was a mass of curls, some disjointed and awkward, others long and straggly, but all alike full of great possibilities of beauty.

"And now the glass," cried Rhoda, realizing that Esther could not see all the loveliness she had created. "Wait till you see yourself."

She dragged Esther to the mirror in the next bedroom, a small, unadjustable affair on the top of a bureau. Esther had to stand on tiptoe to see anything at all, and the quicksilver was lacking in patches. Yet with all its defects and limitations it sufficed. Esther saw only the reflection. She stood immovable and speechless before it, staring at her transformed self.

"You're lovely," cried Rhoda, dancing about in

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great excitement. "Really, Esther, you look altogether different. You like it, don't you?"

"It's so strubbly," commented Esther.

"Strubbly? What's strubbly?"

"My hair. It looks like it wasn't combed a whole week already."

"It's because you are not used to it," said Rhoda. "It will look even better to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" exclaimed Esther. It dawned upon her then that this vision of herself was nothing but a beautiful dream of to-day. If she ever succeeded in getting the tangles out, she must go back to-morrow to her pigtails. "I couldn't go like this always," she remarked to Rhoda.

"Why not?"

"It would make me wain," Esther explained. "God don't want me to be wain."

"Then why did He give you curly hair?" said Rhoda, genuinely surprised. "If He made it curly, why do you try to make it straight?"

It was the question that Esther had once propounded to her mother, and when a satisfactory answer was not forthcoming, she had relegated it to the back of her mind, where she had stored a number of other equally bewildering problems.

Rhoda was insistent. "Why do you, Esther?" she demanded. "Why do you try to make it straight?"

There was no way of evading the issue. "I don't," she replied. "It's her." She purposely avoided

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Rhoda's questioning eyes and indulged in one long, last, lingering look in the mirror.

"Your mother, you mean?"

"Yes, her."

Esther had turned now from the vision of beauty and was beginning to unfasten the airy, fairy, white dress that made her feel like someone else. She tried to shake the curl, too, from her hair. As fast as she could she was returning to her own true, Mennonite self.

So busy was the girl with her transformation and so preoccupied with the perplexing problem of the insidiousness of worldiness that she did not notice a quick step in the adjoining room, but happening to glance at Rhoda, she saw her friend's face blanch suddenly with terror. "Is something wrong?" cried Esther, in alarm.

A frenzy seemed to possess Rhoda. She ran frantically towards the door which connected the two rooms. Esther noticed now that it was barred with a heavy chain. Rhoda wrung her hands in anguish, and then rushed back again to Esther's side and tried to hasten the disrobing. But her fingers were all thumbs, and she got nowhere at it.

Esther stood staring at her. "Is something wrong?" she repeated.

Rhoda did not answer. The door with the chain opened suddenly and forcibly to its limit. Rhoda hurried to close it, but all in vain. Through the crack

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there peered a pair of wildly vacant eyes, a dishevelled head of hair, and a torn night-dress.

"Veronica!" implored Rhoda, "Go back to bed."

Veronica! Was this Veronica? And Rhoda had said she was not at home. It wasn't, it couldn't be, Veronica. There she was shaking her clenched fist at them.

"Don't look!" cried Rhoda, coming now to the spot where her friend stood transfixed. "Oh, Esther, please don't look."

Esther turned her back and did not look again. But never till the end of time could she blot out the memory of the terrible scene she had just witnessed. That clenched fist, those wild eyes, the terror of Rhoda when she tried to close the door, never, never, could she forget these things. She was glad enough to heap Rhoda's finery upon the bed and to find herself once more in her plain, Mennonite garb.

Down the steps the girls hurried, Rhoda ahead, noiselessly, and Esther, stumbling awkwardly at her heels.

"I thought she was after us," said Esther, trying to excuse herself for tripping on the last step. "Is she out of her head?"

"It's fits," replied Rhoda. "Sometimes she gets so bad with them we have to lock her up."

"Can't Dr. Scott cure her?"

But Rhoda declared that Dr. Scott didn't know anything about cases like Veronica's. "She always comes out of them again when they are over," she

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said. "Besides, nobody must know about Veronica. If my mother knew we were upstairs, she would kill me."

"I won't tell," Esther assured her.

"You musn't tell anybody anything that happened," said Rhoda, very impressively. "Promise me, Cross your heart and hope to die."

Esther did not know the ancient, childish rite, but Rhoda taught it to her, and very solemnly she took the oath. To the little Mennonite girl it sounded not only unnecessary but sacrilegious. Among her people a promise, even a spoken promise, was as sacred as the Bible itself.

Mrs. Starling heard the chattering and looked in to inquire about the dusting.

"We'll be done soon now," Rhoda told her. "We stopped for a while and played out on the stoop." She took the neglected duster from the back of the chair, and began to swirl it about industriously.

"It's time for Esther to go home now," said Mrs. Starling. "Supper time soon." In confirmation of her words, the clock struck five. "Tell your mother we won't need any more than three pounds this week, with Veronica away."

Esther got her bonnet and tied the strings under her chin. She had hoped for a repeated invitation to stay for supper, but instead she had been twice invited to go home. With burning cheeks, she found her way through the kitchen to the back door. Her dream of fairyland was shattered. With strange, be-

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wildered thoughts she turned her face towards her own, plain, Mennonite home.

Mrs. Starling waited until she saw Esther on the street and then she called Rhoda to her and said, "However you can be bothered with that Esther Horst I don't know. Her name's enough for me. Why don't you try to get going with people that will get you somewhere in the world? Instead of that you waste your time with Mennonites."

"Mr. Collins says Ephraim will be a Member of Parliament some day?" replied Rhoda, in self-defence.

Her mother scouted the very idea. "Ephraim Horst won't be anything but a preacher, ever," she prophesied. "I've been finding out about him. He wants to be a missionary. He's nobody for my girls."

CHAPTER VI

A County Fight

IT was an interesting village, this Ebytown on the limits of which the Horsts had come to live. In half a century a thriving community of more than a thousand inhabitants had emerged from a stretch of uncleared swamp. Factories had sprung up and multiplied year by year, and it was confidently believed that the little settlement, now firmly established, was standing on the threshold of a great industrial awakening. It was certainly not without reason that the provident Sarah preferred Ebytown to Greenbush as the scene of the activities of her growing family.

Noah saw not the possibilities but the dangers of life in Ebytown. It was much too cosmopolitan a place for him. The time had long gone by when the women all wore bonnets and shawls and the men broad-rimmed hats, while they journeyed together like sisters and brothers in the Lord through this world to that which is to come. The Mennonite settlement had been invaded, yes, literally swamped, with refugees from the industrial and military persecutions of Germany. These people were either Lutherans or Roman Catholics, and they brought with them strange customs. They were imbued, the Mennonites thought, with very worldly ideas. Noah feared for his

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children, knowing how susceptible are unregenerated young people to the allurements of this life which now is.

Twelve miles down the river was Shade's Mills, a Scotch settlement totally different from Ebytown. It had been founded in the early days of the century by one Absolom Skade, a Pennsylvanian; and it had grown up almost synchronously with Ebytown, quite outstripping it, however, in both population and importance. Vague rumours of the life these Scotch people lived had come to the Mennonites. Civilized Indians, some said they were, retaining their savage taste for firewater and indulging in their primitive war dances, clad in short petticoats, with bare knees exposed, while one of their number marched solemnly up and down blowing wind into great bags, and producing thereby a noise suggestive of the pandemonium of hell. Once they had defied Providence with a circus, and brought an epidemic of the deadly Asiatic cholera not only upon their own wicked heads but also upon many of their righteous neighbours in Ebytown. Sarah and Noah disagreed about Ebytown, but about Shade's Mills there could be only one opinion. They would both have been glad if it had been another twelve miles distant.

Now it happened that at the turn of the half-century, Parliament in session at Toronto decided that the interests of the country could best be served by the combining of contiguous townships into the larger unit of the county. Without giving the matter due

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consideration, the worthy legislators planned that Shade's Mills and its Scotch township should be unequally yoked together with four townships to the north inhabited by people of Pennsylvania Dutch and German birth. Of these counties, Ebytown was the most populous village and the geographic centre. Yet it was decided that, tentatively, at least, Shade's Mills was to be the county-town.

This decree was very gratifying to the citizens of the prospective county-town, but it aroused immediately a most intense indignation among the people of the north. Ebytown, in particular, was insulted, incensed. What right had Parliament to disturb the quiet serenity of their nest by thrusting into it a bird of another feather? Were they expected to stand by, with their heads under their wings, while the intruder preened himself and prepared to rule the roost? Parliament had not reckoned with the people of Ebytown, who would soon show Shade's Mills its proper place in the corner or, better still, eject it altogether.

There was no lack of excitement in Ebytown that winter. Men stood on the street corners in zero weather waving their arms to high heaven and declaring that they would wipe Shade's Mills off the map. The women found a new and very absorbing topic for a mid-day discussion over the back-yard fence. Huge snow forts were thrown up by the children, and there the younger generation prepared to do battle over the vexed question. The greatest care was always exercised that to the smallest, weakest

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tots should be commissioned the defence of the Shade's Mills fortifications.

But the people of Ebytown did more than talk. From time to time they sent formidable deputations to the Legislature at Toronto to advance, as diplomatically and yet as emphatically as possible, this argument and that in support of Ebytown's claims to the county honours. Sometimes in the ante-chambers these men encountered like formidable deputations from Shade's Mills with sheaves of arguments in support of that municipality. The wary legislators graciously consented to hear these conflicting dissertations, listened with doubtful interest, and made fair promises to both parties without compromising themselves in any way with either. When the disputants had departed, the bored parliamentarians aroused themselves from their lethargy, lit their fat cigars, yawned intermittingly, shrugged their irresponsible shoulders, and asked each other if they had any idea what the infernal row was all about.

All the while the feud was kept burning by frequent mass meetings in Ebytown, in Shade's Mills, and at numerous intervening settlements. The crowds gathered early, and the question of the day was always discussed in small groups with invective surpassed only by that of the later and more experienced speakers on the platform. In the wee small hours of the morning, the men returned to their homes with their original store of arguments confirmed and augmented,

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and, alas, too often, with their cruse of bitterness filled to the brim.

The Mennonite preachers saw in this contention the snare of the great Fowler, whose purpose it was to embroil the plain people with the mundane things of life. They lost no opportunity to remind their people that Ebytown was, after all, no abiding city, and that its citizens were but pilgrims and strangers in it. They admonished them with all diligence to be sure of their citizenship in that eternal city towards which they were journeying, that celestial city, whose builder and maker is God. That only was important. And yet there were a few Mennonites, an unsaved remnant, who hankered after the mass meetings, thereby evincing to their more righteous brethren alarming symptoms of spiritual decay.

Feeling was running high at Ebytown when the exciting news was spread about that Shade's Mills had challenged Ebytown to a public debate with two speakers on each side. The largest hall in the Scotch village was being requisitioned to accommodate the immense crowd which the occasion was expected to draw. The judgment was to be as impartial as three disinterested members of Parliament could make it, and it was hoped that after the debate the legislators would be able to find no excuse for shelving the question any longer. The coveted honour would naturally go to the side that should win in the argument, and the municipality of the vanquished would be expected to bury the hatchet in silence, and forever.

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Ebytown took up the challenge with alacrity, but declined to have anything to do with the Members of Parliament, who, they said, would have settled the squabble months before, if they had had the brains with which they were generally credited. They were sick to death of the everlasting see-sawing at Toronto. Leave it to the audience, they suggested. They alone could be trusted to give an intelligent verdict.

Shade's Mills still held out for parliamentary judges, but, unfortunately, they were unable to find a single member of the Legislature who would consent to so much as grace the meeting with his presence. This took the edge off the debate. Shade's Mills would have withdrawn the challenge, but Ebytown held them to it. The absence of the legislators would, the latter maintained, mean comfortable seats for three more local men with whom the question under discussion was a burning issue.

All arrangements had been completed three weeks before the date of the meeting. Half the hall was to be reserved for the visitors from Ebytown and vicinity, the centre aisle dividing the Teutons from the Scots. Appropriate music and recitations were to be interspersed between the opposing speeches—like flashes of lightning, it was facetiously suggested, in the midst of a reverberating thunderstorm.

From the first, it was understood that Ebytown's chief representative in the great debate should be its reeve, Dr. John Scott, who could dilate on the uncertain pulse of the body politic fully as intelligently

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as upon those ills which flesh is heir to. Mr. Collins, the new grammar school teacher, who in a few months had earned a reputation for erudition second only to that of the learned physician, was chosen as his colleague. In these two men and in their confidence of the justice of their claim the people of Ebytown put their trust.

It was Mr. Collins' fertile brain that conceived the idea of having the Pennsylvania Dutch people of the community make some contribution to the programme. Since they were the original, and for the first quarter of the century, the only inhabitants of the four townships, they must be aroused from their indifference and persuaded to support more actively the claims of Ebytown. He allowed this idea to revolve in his mind until at last he hit upon a plan. Ephraim Horst must recite—in Pennsylvania Dutch, if possible. Bedad! it was the very thing.

"Ephraim," he said, one day at school, "do you happen to know a poem in the dialect of your people?"

"I know what everybody knows, 'Das alt Schulhaus an der Krick'," replied the boy. He recited it in part for the teacher.

"Splendid!" cried Mr. Collins, who hadn't understood a word of it. "It has a good swing. I want you to say it at the debate in Shade's Mills two weeks from to-night."

Ephraim was up against it. He knew how strong was the aversion his father and all his people entertained towards anything that savoured of politics. And

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yet how could he refuse to do this trifling thing for Mr. Collins, who had done so much for him?

"Your father will let you go?" asked the teacher, who seemed to have suddenly sensed the situation. "I'll arrange that with him. Dr. Scott is driving, and we are to go with him."

"Ach, well, then," replied Ephraim, thereby giving his consent.

During the next fortnight the boy's time and attention was centred upon the insignificant part he was to play in the great meeting. He spent hours rehearsing his recitation, practising the intonation, the emphasis, and the gestures. Sometimes at night he was awakened by the sound of his own voice in strange, strained accents. He seemed to be saying something backwards.

On the eve of the long-expected day, Manassah announced his intention of attending the debate. He would take the team and the bob-sleigh and as many of the young men of the neighbourhood as could be packed in. They would start early in the afternoon in order to ensure good seats.

"Then I'll go with *you*," said Ephraim, unconsciously stressing the last word.

Manassah pricked up his ears. "Was you thinkin' about goin' with somebody else?" he inquired.

"With Mr. Collins and Dr. Scott," replied Ephraim, "but I'd feel more to home with you."

"With them you was going!" ejaculated his father. "Did you ast them could you go along?"

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"No, they ast me," said Ephraim. It was evident that Mr. Collins had neglected to interview his father on the matter.

Noah was genuinely alarmed and not a little indignant. "Mr. Collins, how you call him, was to be learning you Latin," he said, "and now, 'tseems, it's politics. Politics!" He repeated it censoriously. "But if you start once on the downward road, it goes quick. One thing leads on to the next."

Out of consideration for his father's feelings, Ephraim forbore to announce at this time in what capacity he was going to Shade's Mills. He felt a little guilty about withholding the truth from his parents, but not at all about going. If politics are bad, he reasoned, it is only because bad men get into them.

The sleighing party gave every promise of a real jollification. The floor of the sleigh-box was covered with straw, and in it a score of husky farmers' sons faced each other and stretched their nether limbs from side to side. Manassah was the driver, and on the bench beside him sat Ephraim and Levi Gingerich, the hired man. Every mother's son of them was bundled to the nose and warm as toast. Every youthful breast beat high with anticipation. All was ready. They made themselves comfortable in their allotted places. Manassah picked up the reins and told the horses to go on.

Before they reached the gate, they encountered Simeon Ernst, with distress written upon his face. He had hurried and was puffing like a porpoise.

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Manassah stopped the horses. "What's wrong?" he asked.

Sarah ran up from the kitchen door. Was Lydia sick, or was it the baby? She wrapped her hands in her apron to keep her teeth from chattering.

Levi nudged Ephraim. "He wants to go along," he said, "but he don't know how to say it."

"Him?" said Ephraim, dubiously. "Why, he's a preacher."

"Chust you wait and see," said Levi, confidently. He remarked on the fur coat and cap and the great woollen scarf that Simeon had muffled superfluously about his neck and ears.

"You didn't tell me yet is Lydy sick," said the anxious mother.

"No," said Simeon, when he could get his breath. "She's not sick but she wants Esther to go right away over for company with the bubbly. She's always so afraid at the dark."

"At the dark!" was the general exclamation. It was one o'clock midday, and the sun was shining in all its glory.

Somebody tittered in the front seat. "See," said Levi, as he poked Ephraim's elbow.

Simeon had already placed his foot on the runner and was trying to pull himself and his fur coat up into the front seat. "I'm going, too," he announced.

"There's no room," Manassah told him.

"Must Levi go?" The preacher turned and looked hard at the hired boy.

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Simeon's intention had dawned upon Noah. "You're not going?" he said, incredulously. "And you a preacher yet."

"It's not that I want to go," Simeon explained, "but I feel I must. If something would happen to them, it would always be on my mind that I left them go alone."

"It's the devil's own camp-meeting," opined Noah. "Yes, you go along, Simeon, and watch them good."

"Ephraim can stop to home," observed Sarah.

"Or Levi," was Simeon's suggestion.

"Him, too," agreed Sarah. "They can both stop. Then Cyrus could go. With Simeon along, they can't do him nothing."

This brought forth an indignant reply from Manassah. He declared that what he had said before he would say again, namely, that he wouldn't take Cyrus if he had a dozen vacant places. To his way of thinking, it was Simeon who should stay at home.

"Can you go with Dr. Scott and Mr. Collins?" whispered Levi.

Ephraim shook his head. Only that morning he had told Mr. Collins that he was going with Manassah.

"Well, you must go," decided Levi, who alone of all the crowd shared Ephraim's secret, "so I must stop."

Simeon heard and announced Levi's decision with great glee. He had been standing in front of the two boys waiting to pop into whichever seat should be

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vacated for him. He pulled out the robes that Levi had tucked so carefully about his legs.

"It's not that I want to stop," Levi remarked in mock seriousness, with a sly glance at Simeon, "but I feel that I must. What if something would happen to the cows? It would always be on my mind that I let them alone."

This sally was greeted with a round of applause from the box. The discomfited Simeon pulled up the robes and Levi helped to tuck him in. A cheer for the hired boy, a jingle of bells, a shout of farewell and they were off—off for a night of excitement the like of which had never yet been known in the history of the far-famed village of Shade's Mills.

Levi's disappointment was intense. It was written on every feature of his face. His first impulse was to run to the barn to hide it.

"Levi!" It was Esther who called. The others had hurried back to the warmth of the kitchen, leaving the girl alone on the back porch. "Levi, come here once."

The hired boy stood a moment, undecided.

"Ain't you comin'?" cried Esther, a trifle testily.

"If I'm comin'?" answered Levi, still halting between two opinions.

"Well then, stop," Esther flung at him over her shoulder. She ran into the house and banged the door.

By this time Levi had decided to vouchsafe the girl the desired interview. He stuck his hands in his

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pockets and went to the house whistling. But Esther wasn't in the kitchen.

"What was you wanting?" asked Sarah, peering at him over her spectacles.

"Nothing."

"Nothing!" exclaimed Sarah. "Then what for did you come?"

"To see her—Esther."

"You chose a bad time," commented Sarah. "Esther's goin' right away to Lydy's over. I thought you was to mind the cows."

Levi beat a hasty exit, not to the barn but to the front of the house. There he waited in the cold until Esther came along. "Did you want something?" he asked her.

"I did," replied Esther, coolly, "but I don't now."

Levi thrust his hands deeper into his pockets, turned on his heel, and began to whistle.

"Levi."

"That's how they call me."

"You're laughing at me."

"Not at you," protested Levi.

"At who, then?"

"At fate."

Esther stared at him blankly.

"A long mouth don't get you nowhere," the young man explained. "If the kettle won't boil, whistle; if it boils over, whistle twict as hard."

"You're a funny boy." Esther smiled expansively

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at him. "I could cry that you can't go to Shade's Mills."

Levi could himself, he declared, if it would do any good. He had never been so disappointed in all his life.

"Life is queer," philosophized Esther, from her experience of fifteen years. "You want to go, but here you must set; I want to set, but no, I must go. Ephraim said I could have his Latin Book to learn a little, but I can't over to Lydy's."

"Latin!" exclaimed Levi.

"Yes, Latin. Don't you hear good, Levi?"

"But you are chust a girl."

"And girls, you think, have only rattles in their heads," retorted Esther. "We can think as good as you can. Better." She added it defiantly.

Levi did not reply for fear of precipitating a quarrel. He never knew how to treat these incomprehensible creatures called girls.

Esther had an insatiable curiosity about Levi, and this, she decided, was the time to appease it. She asked him bluntly why he was studying Latin. Did he want to be a missionary like Ephraim?

"I'm not good enough for that," said the boy.

"Of course you're not so good as Ephraim," observed Esther, frankly, "but you ain't so bad as the heathens yet. You might pull them a little out of their mud, if only you would feel to go to Chapan."

But Levi had no intention of becoming a missionary, and he wasn't going to let a mere slip of a girl

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push him headlong into the mire and slime of heathendom.

"A doctor, then, mebbe," suggested Esther. "Look at Dr. Scott and all the good he does. If you would be like him now. . . If I was a boy, I'd be a doctor."

"I'm not clever enough," said Levi. "My brains are all rattles."

Esther shot at him an accusing look. "You're laughing at me now," she said.

"I'm not. All the time I'm laughing at fate."

Esther knew better, she said.

"I laugh to think how far off it is, and how hard I have to work to get there."

"Where?"

"To my ideal."

"To what you want to be, you mean?"

"Yes, to be a teacher like Mr. Collins," said Levi. "Little children I chust love. If I could learn them good. . ."

"Teach them, Ephraim says we must say," interrupted Esther.

The correction was received with good grace. "Mebbe it's because I'm only a poor orphan boy, but I feel so for the children," he went on. "If I knew enough I could teach them. They would learn from me. That's what I'm trying for with the Latin. But it's a secret. Why did I have to go and tell you, I wonder."

"Because I ast you," laughed Esther.

Then Levi turned the tables. Why was she study-

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ing Latin, he wanted to know. She couldn't be a doctor, or a missionary, or a teacher.

Esther blushed to the roots of her hair. She suddenly remembered that she ought to be on her way to the Ernsts'.

"That's not fair," protested Levi.

"I don't want to tell."

"Nor I," Levi reminded her, "but I did."

"But mine's not grand and wonderful like yours and Ephraim's."

"Every ideal is wonderful," said Levi.

Esther's confusion increased with Levi's persistency. In all fairness she was bound to tell, but how was she going to do it? "It's—it's—most women are it," she stammered, at last. "All but me, and I can't be. Mam said."

Levi stood and looked at her, puzzled over the enigma she had given him to solve.

"If you can't guess that, you won't make no good of a teacher," the girl added, running away from him. "Your brain is all rattles."

At this juncture, Sarah came to the door, and gave vent to vials of wrath. Levi had to take the brunt of it, for Esther was soon well upon her way. "You leave her alone," she advised, among other things. "You can't have her. I won't give her up—never. Ach, me! Ach, me! I wish Manassah would 've had sense enough to have took you along to Shade's Mills, and let you there always. It will give trouble, I can see, with you around."

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Levi pulled his cap over his ears and went off whistling. Shade's Mills! What wouldn't he give to be on his way there at that moment?

It was, indeed, a memorable occasion, that night of the great debate in the Scotch village. During the afternoon the men had flocked in from all directions. By seven o'clock two hundred sleighs could have been counted in the streets surrounding the hall, and still they were coming. By eight o'clock every available chair was occupied. Some dangled their feet from the window-sills, others crowded about the door. A contingent from the north had come early enough to usurp three rows of seats reserved for the people of Shade's Mills, and nothing short of force could have induced them to relinquish them. The air was thick enough to cut, Dr. Scott declared, when he arrived. He ordered every window open.

"Them doctors are awful bossy," Simeon remarked to Manassah. The Horst party had secured comfortable seats near the centre of the great hall.

"We'll all ketch our death of cold," Manassah was sure.

"And me, I wish I could die," sighed Ephraim, who sat between his brother and his brother-in-law.

"What's wrong with you?" cried both his elders at once.

"Nothing," was the evasive reply.

The cross-examination which might have ensued was forestalled by intimations that the meeting was about to open. A portly gentleman of conspicuous

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dignity took the chair, the governor, the Horsts suspected. Having peremptorily ordered Shade's Mills to begin the debate, he sat down and devoted his attention to a massive, gold watch which he had placed on the table before him.

The speaker from Shade's Mills proved to be no less a person than its founder and chief citizen, Abso-lom Shade, a man of nearly sixty, but full of energy and force of character. Straight as an arrow he stood before his audience and poured out an impassioned appeal for the village that bore his name. Half an hour he talked, argued, declaimed, until it seemed there was nothing left to be said on the subject. The case of his opponents was assuredly lost before it was begun.

Then came a pleasing diversion, as the chairman called it, a solo entitled "Home, Sweet Home". As the sentiment was one in which both parties could con-cur, the entire audience was invited to stand and join in the chorus.

Mr. Collins was the next speaker, and right well he realized that his reputation was at stake. It was a difficult situation he faced, but he had recourse to a fund of pungent Irish wit. He spoke with much ani-mation, pounded the table, fanned the air, shrieked and bellowed. Without cracking a smile himself, he fairly convulsed his audience with laughter. Ebytown was lauded to the skies; Shade's Mills was trailed in the dust. Before he sat down, there were cheers and hisses.

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"That don't get us nowhere," said Manassah.

Simeon had been greatly impressed. "If only they would get so earnest about religion," he said.

"People would say they were crazy," Manassah believed.

"But this is only for time," the preacher went on, "and religion is for eternity."

Manassah glared at him. "Religion and politics are like oil and water," he said. "They don't mix. Next time I'll fetch Levi along and you can set to home with your religion."

Simeon had no time to reply. The bagpipes had started up, and the audience was greeting them with loud acclaim. Such music there never was in the ears of a Scotchman.

"It sounds like hell," Simeon felt constrained to remark. It was the one religious word that had a place, it seemed, in the parlance of politics.

Manassah bit his lip and said nothing.

"Bare knees yet," sneered the preacher, "and a petticoat. He ought to shame himself."

"Shut up!"

The third speaker was on the platform executing his bow. Ah, here was the man, to judge by appearances. He was young. The smile of conquest was already upon his lips, the sparkle of triumph in his eye. A hush pervaded the hall. The audience sat on the edge of their chairs, waiting expectantly to be carried off on the crest of some great wave of oratorical effort. They were ready for the plunge.

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"Fellow citizens and friends," the young orator began. "Thirty years ago this country was nothing but a wilderness, and . . ."

"How do you know?" harried a fat old German who sat in the front row supporting his corpulence with a stout cane between his knees.

"Put him out!" demanded a peppery Scot.

"You'll need help," warned the Teuton.

The speaker tried to ignore the interruption. He cleared his throat and began again. "Thirty years ago this country was nothing but a wilderness, and . . ."

He stopped again, this time from sheer apprehension lest the German might repeat his impertinent remark.

"Twice you told us that before," ragged his uncertified opponent in the front seat. "Tell us something we don't know."

A titter of amusement ran through the room, but it was immediately suppressed when it was perceived that the orator had braced himself for a third attempt.

"Thirty years ago this country was nothing but a wilderness," the young man reiterated.

"Three time and out," jeered the German, whom all Ebytown, after much neck-craning, came to recognize as old Fritz Gaukel, the well-known proprietor of their most popular tavern. "Come on, sonny, and have a drink on me."

The young man cast an agonizing glance at his Scotch friends.

"Go on!" came the message of encouragement,

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Loud and uncontrolled laughter from Ebytown.

"Don't pay any attention to that old soak."

The budding orator took fresh courage and began again on another tack. "I wish . . ."

"Go on!"

Another spasm of laughter from the enemy's side of the room.

By this time, despair had seized the speaker. He had forgotten his lines. Only his chagrin remained. He stood a moment, speechless, and then he blurted out, "I wish it had stayed a wilderness, then I wouldn't have needed to make such a blasted fool of myself." He ran from the platform, and made a wild dash over the chairs and their occupants to the exit at the back of the hall.

Old Fritz Gaukel raised himself on his cane and tried to hobble after him, wedging his way with difficulty through the crowd. "Wait a little, sonny," he kept calling out, "Don't have it all drunk till I get there."

One half the audience were convulsed with laughter; the other, hot with rage. The pompous chairman kept calling vainly for order.

Absolom Shade rose in all his dignity and claimed the right to use the remainder of his colleague's time. He held up a sheaf of notes, the arguments of which he hadn't had time to present.

The chairman would not hear of it. They would go on to the next thing on the programme, a recitation

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by Ephraim Horst. Had he pronounced the name correctly?

"Ephraim? Ephraim! Ephraim!!" The ejaculations came from the Mennonite party, with varied inflections of voice.

Ephraim was on the platform before he knew it. He glanced at Mr. Collins, bowed and announced the title of his literary effusion, "Das alt Schulhaus an der Krick."

"Put him out!" A mere interlocution.

"Heit is's 'x'actly zwanzig Johr
Dass ich bin owwe naus;
Nau bin ich widder lewig z'rick
Un schteh am Schulhaus an d'r Krick
Juscht neekscht an's Dody's Haus."

"Make him stop!" shrieked an infuriated Scotchman. He started for the platform with the evident intention of carrying out his own command.

Ephraim went blithely on—

"Ich bin in hunnert Heiser g'west,
Vun Marble stie' un Brick,
Un alles was sie hen, die Leit
Phet ich verschwappe eenig Zeit
For's Schulhaus an der Krick."

The selection had thirty-one stanzas, but Ephraim got no farther. A blow on his head from the knotty cane of his enraged assailant and the boy dropped un-

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conscious. His blood gushed forth as from a fountain.

"Murder!" roared Dr. Scott, springing up like a wild-cat and rushing to Ephraim's side. Manassah was there before him, peering anxiously into his brother's blood-bespattered face. A nameless fear overcame him.

"He's alive," announced the doctor, after what seemed an eternity of time. "But hold the murderer."

From then on, pandemonium reigned. A pitched battle broke out between the two camps. There were blows and curses. Like a pack of buffaloes on a stampede, the audience seemed to have gone suddenly mad.

"Order!" yelled the chairman, over the din. He was quite unmindful now of his dignity. "Sit down! Yes, he's conscious."

The Mennonite flock, shepherded by Simeon Ernst, had sought refuge in a corner of the room. There they were huddled together, aghast with anxiety. They had learned their lesson. No more politics for them.

"Sit down!" commanded Dr. Scott. "You fools! Sit down!"

"Dr. Scott has the floor," announced the impotent chairman. "He will conclude the debate."

But the audience had had enough. The crowd was thinning out. Some risked life and limb by jumping from the windows. Broken chairs and canes lay about. There was a jam at the door.

Dr. Scott could not forbear a laugh. "This debate has already been concluded," he said, a trifle ironically.

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“Will the saving remnant of our audience rise and sing with me the national anthem? Sing it out of your hearts, men, like they do in auld Scotland. If we have many more meetings like this, the good Queen will need to be saved.”

An exaggerated report of the turbulent meeting at Shade's Mills came to the ears of certain politicians, who, fearing further trouble, decided that the vexed question must be settled at once. At the next session of the House, after a very amiable conference over the matter, it was decreed that while Shade's Mills would probably always be the town of the county,—a pleasing sop, this, to the disappointed—Ebytown was to have the county buildings. And so, with one stroke of the pen, the hand of authority and law brought peace, or at least the forbearance of open conflict, between the two rival municipalities.

CHAPTER VII

The Felling of the Oaks

NEAR nor far, there never was such a pretentious judicial structure as the court-house which was to be erected in Ebytown. The council were unanimous in their decision that it must be ornate, if nothing else, with large arched windows and massive doors, and that only the best of materials should be used throughout. But the height of their extravagance was a large cupola, which was to be to the building a crown of glory, giving it an indefinable air of distinction. Twenty-five thousand dollars sounded a fabulous price, but the council stood their ground in the face of all criticism. "Wait," they said, "until you see the cupola."

The question of the hour was to secure a suitable site for this magnificent pile of bricks and mortar. It was not so easy as it seemed. If the council looked at any piece of land, immediately the price went up sky-high. They became discouraged, chagrined. Was it possible the cupola would have to be lopped off in the end?

Once more old Fritz Gaukel came to the rescue. He owned two and a half acres of land situated in the very heart of Ebytown. It was valuable property, but he was willing to lay it on the altar of public sac-

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rifice for the nominal sum of one dollar, as a token of the satisfaction he had experienced in the final decision of the Legislature. It was worth that much to him, he declared, to get ahead of Shade's Mills.

Fritz went to the next meeting of the village council and made his offer formally. It was accepted most informally with three cheers and a tiger for the donor. The reeve, Dr. Scott, happened to know that the County Council had been casting covetous eyes on that very property, but had realized its value. And now the cupola was saved. It was all due to Mr. Gaukel, who had given a worthy gift in behalf of a worthy cause. A public benefaction, Dr. Scott had called it.

Old Fritz beamed expansively.

"The people of Ebytown must not be allowed to forget our friend and his generosity," said the good doctor. "I propose that we name a street for him."

"Fritz?" asked someone, evidently a trifle concerned about the dignity of the municipality.

"Frederick," the doctor thought, "would be more euphonious." He added the further suggestion that another street might be given the surname of the beneficent German.

The old tavern-keeper was pleased to the extent of an all-suffusing grin. He sat, and continued to sit, within the charmed circle, in his favourite position on the edge of his chair, or so his corpulence made it appear, his heavy cane between his knees.

"You all know that Mr. Gaukel stole my speech

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at the famous debate," said Dr. Scott. "I want to say that I forgive him to-night."

"You're welcome," cried old Fritz, shambling over to where the doctor stood in all his dignity of office, and shaking his hand whole-heartedly. "And if you've got two more streets handy, call them John and Scott. The doctor is the best bull-headed Scotchman I know. I move it."

With much laughter, old Fritz was for the time being adopted into the council. His motion was duly passed and recorded in the minutes.

So four of the principal streets of the village were named, and two of its prominent citizens were thereby recompensed to all time for their public-spiritedness.

In the spring of 1852 the task of erecting the new court-house was begun. But no sooner had the committee in charge decided upon its exact location than they were confronted with three oak trees of enormous girth that had staked their claim centuries before in the forest primeval. There they stood in all their venerable strength and glory, waving their branches defiantly in the wind. The worst of it was that in all Ebytown there could be found nobody who would undertake to remove the obstructions. The people saw, by turns, the awkward and the ludicrous sides of the situation and shook their heads. The trees towered over them in lofty contempt.

At length a novel scheme was hit upon to make the removal of the oaks a matter of public enterprise. If anyone could be found who could lay low the three

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monsters, his were to be the honour and the spoils. But whoever should make the attempt and fail, he must pay into the treasury ten dollars a cord for all the wood he should destroy or carry away, the minimum being twenty dollars. He must, moreover, expect to be held up temporarily as the butt of public ridicule.

The trees and their final demolition became the all-absorbing topic of conversation. Men stood in the near-by streets with their hands in their pockets discussing how the feat could be accomplished. Their ultimate conclusions were announced by a pugnacious wagging of the head, by an exaggerated winking of the eye, or by the expectoration of a huge wad of tobacco across the sidewalk. Each man had his own individual method of declaring that to cut down those trees was as easy as rolling off a log.

There were those who felt encouraged to try it. They lopped off limbs here and there, and chopped great holes into the sides of the trunks. Soon they grew weary of what they considered a hopeless job, deposited their money in the treasury, and endured the jeers of the onlookers. The giant oaks waved their crests more haughtily than ever.

Manassah Horst conceived the idea one day that he could fell the trees. He needed timber to build a new barn. Having listened attentively to numerous ideas which others entertained on the subject, he formed a rather unique plan of his own. He would carry it through, too, to a successful issue before the week was over. So Manassah threw his hat into the

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ring. A great cheer went up. More amusement for the crowd.

The first move of the new hero was to seek the help of men who had had practical experience in lumbering.

"Help you?" said some. "Sure we will. You're a good boss."

"Yes," said others, "if you will pay us good."

"And if the whiskey is plenty," added a big, husky fellow who, though young, had acquired the great, unquenchable thirst.

Manassah's answer was as startling as it was final: "No whiskey at all."

"What! Beer for a chob like that?"

"Not a drop," said Manassah. "Ale."

Smiles broke out again.

"Adam's ale," said Manassah.

Down went the corners of their mouths. Some mumbled imprecations upon the Mennonite's accursed head. "Beer don't make you drunk," they argued. "Never."

"Mine won't," replied Manassah, doggedly.

"Stingy!"

"Crazy!" said others. Who had ever heard of refusing to give workmen their legitimate beer? Was there ever a barn-raising, or a sheep-shearing, or a threshing, or even the simplest butchering without the ubiquitous black jug? Why make an exception in this tree-felling business?

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"Liquor don't go with this chob," said Manassah, and nobody could alter his decision in the least.

Presently a handful of men were found who were willing to work without liquor. Manassah smiled and called them his Gideon band. With such men as they at his command, the three oak trees would fall to the ground, he said, as did the walls of Jericho in the long ago.

But Manassah's men did more than walk about the trees and look at their task. For two days they worked steadily in the sun, quenching their thirst from buckets of water. Some climbed the trees and severed the branches from the trunks, while others tried to weaken the trunks near the ground with axes and cross-cut saws. Levi was on hand doing the work of two men, Manassah said, while Ephraim offered his good wishes and what assistance he could.

The incredulous crowd of onlookers jeered and criticized. They wanted to know what Manassah was going to do with all that wood.

"Start a saw-mill," was the reply.

"It will cost you a penny at ten dollars a cord," came back the taunt.

"It will cost me nothing," said Manassah, so coolly that the scoffers looked at each other and whistled.

Before noon of the third day the branches had all been removed and the bare trunks of the trees stood like giants stripped of their clothing and ready for the final bout of the conflict. At their sides dangled

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heavy ropes, like the plaits of hair that brought about the downfall of the mighty Samson.

A noisy, excited crowd had gathered to witness the hazardous enterprise.

"He can't do it."

"No, never."

"Shut all the best men out with his crazy temperance notion." This from the disappointed man with the thirst, who emphasized his remark by emitting with great vehemence a huge wad of over-chewed tobacco.

Manassah had no ears for these comments. While the men were tugging at the ropes and plying the saw back and forth into the very vitals of the smallest of the three mighty oaks, he was giving his directions. "Yo-heave," he would say, and "Steady now," and periodically, by way of encouragement, "She's coming."

Along came a strong west wind to help. There was a crackling of timbers, a warning shout from the spectators, a scattering of the workmen and the first of the defiant trio lay vanquished on the ground. Only a jagged, sawed-off stump remained of all its glory.

"Bedad! he did it," cried Mr. Collins, elated as if he had done it himself.

"He did it—once," replied a disgruntled bystander. "But there's two more."

"He'll get them too," prophesied the teacher. "If he's anything like Ephraim, he can do anything he wants to." He caught sight of his favourite pupil. "Stay away from it, Ephraim," he advised. "You

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got struck on the head once. The second time it might be fatal."

But Ephraim only smiled and continued to work.

The second tree was laid low by a similiar method. But it did not fall as was expected; and Ephraim, unfortunately, ran into instead of out of danger. The spectators stood screaming helplessly. It was a narrow escape, somewhere between an inch and two, it was generally computed, but after all the boy was alive and unharmed.

Mr. Collins' face was as white as a sheet. He went to Manassah and implored him to order Ephraim off. It was a shame for a boy of his brain, he said, to be allowed to do that kind of work.

"Leave me go to the ropes," pleaded Levi. "I can pull twict as hard as Ephraim."

"Yes, let Levi go, if somebody must," said the teacher.

"If I would get killed," said Levi, "Nobody would care."

"I would, Little Brother," said Manassah.

Levi's heart suddenly bounded with a great joy. He was no longer a homeless, orphaned boy. Somebody cared.

Ephraim was ordered to the saw, and Levi prepared to handle a rope. The trunk was sawn to the last degree of safety. They were waiting for Manassah's "Yo-heave!"

"It can't be done," was the universal verdict. "Somebody's sure to get caught if it is."

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"Yo-heave!" cried Manassah, steadily.

Every worker's eye was fixed upon the tree, every muscle strained to bring about its downfall.

But the mighty oak stood immovable. For an hour the men tugged, and jerked, and pulled; for another hour they chopped, and hammered, and sawed. At five o'clock the tree was still standing. The men were tired and hungry. Besides it looked like an impossible task they had undertaken. Cyrus and other boys, who had been among the most interested of the spectators, began to chase each other about, carrying their jollity into the very shadow of the great, immovable monster and scorning the danger that seemed not imminent.

But Manassah had made up his mind to finish the job that day. Not a wink of sleep for him until that tree was down. He called his men together for another long final pull at it.

This time the tree gave way and fell with a terrible crash beside its late companions. The impossible had been accomplished. The trees themselves with their sixty thousand feet of lumber and the honour of having felled them belonged to Manassah Horst.

A joyous shout of congratulation rent the air, followed by a shrill cry of distress.

"He's dead!" the people cried.

"Who?"

"Levi, the hired boy. He's underneath."

The excited witnesses of the horror rushed forward with their story. They had seen him fall. They had heard him scream.

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A ghastly silence.

There were more screams. Where was he?

"It's Cyrus!" cried one.

"Cyrus?"

"Cyrus and him both," was the man's amazing reply. The child was running about when the tree began to totter, he maintained. Levi had seen the danger and rushed to save him. They were both underneath the branches hidden by the underbrush.

"Run for Dr. Scott," ordered Manassah.

All hands to the rescue. They dug the two boys out of the underbrush, Cyrus laughing and posing as the hero of the hour, Levi silent, and limp, and pale as death itself.

The doctor examined Levi. His right arm was broken, but that would heal. Who was "the bra lad-die", anyway?

"He's my little brother," said Manassah. "Can't we take him home?"

* * * *

During the weeks that followed Levi suffered much, but he endured with courage and fortitude. His arm, it turned out, had not been properly set at first, and the boy had to choose between carrying a crooked arm all his life and having it broken and reset.

"Will it cost much?" he asked, wistfully.

"Not a red penny, if it's money you mean," replied the doctor. "But it will hurt. Hoots, mon, it will hurt." Then he related that in a letter just received

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from across the water he had learned that a graduate of his own Edinburgh University had discovered a drug that would deaden pain. Chloroform, it was called. If only he had it. . .

"But the Lord sent the pain," interjected Sarah. "If he didn't want Levi to have it, he wouldn't 've sent it. We must let everything to the Lord."

"Stuff and nonsense!" growled the doctor. "It says in my guid mother's Presbyterian Bible that the Lord caused a deep sleep to come over Adam when He took out his rib to make that bothersome Eve. The Lord isn't for pain and loneliness. He wants everybody well and happy. If only I had some of that chloroform. . ."

Levi declared that he would be more afraid of the drug than he was of the pain.

"That's a bra laddie," said the doctor. "Come here." He laid Levi's bare arm across his knee and broke it by sheer force, then reset it and bound it up with the bandages that Hannah had made for him. It was a painful operation, but the young hero endured it without a murmur, though tears stood in his eyes and he trembled in every limb.

CHAPTER VIII

The School Examination

BY the time snow fell that autumn the court-house was not a dream but an accomplished reality. Its magnificent cupola was the pride and boast of the county, and especially of the county-town. Because of it, Ebytown took unto itself a new glory.

The county council were delighted with the building, but vastly more pleased with themselves, the builders. When they assembled for their first meeting in the new and commodious quarters, they straightway forgot their petty differences, and gave themselves up to expressions of satisfaction and self-congratulation. It was an unusual occasion of felicitous harmony.

Now it happened that a certain very sagacious pedagogue chose this auspicious time to make an appeal for a cause which, he said, lay very near to his heart. He asked nothing for himself, whom he introduced as plain George Black from Shade's Mills, but he had a proposal to make which, if adopted, would cement into one neighbourhood the three distinctive nationalities of the county. It was very simple—nothing more nor less than a friendly competition among the schools of the county, a sort of glorified spelling-match, if they knew what he meant. He suggested that three scholars be

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chosen to represent each school, and that a disinterested examiner be asked to rate their intellectual attainments. He could think of no better man than Mr. Sargent, teacher of mathematics at the Normal School in Toronto. The contest should be held in Ebytown, in that very room. Each school would be glad to provide for the transportation of its representatives in return for the wonderful opportunity of having the children see with their own eyes, indoors as well as out, the magnificent structure which men of wisdom and foresight had erected in the county-town as a memorial to themselves for all time. (Cheers and laughter.) All that was needed to consummate the plan was—he said it as boldly as he dared—a hundred dollars.

“A hundred dollars!” A gasp went around the room. “A hundred dollars! What for?”

“For books.”

A hundred dollars for books! It was outrageous.

“For prizes, you know,” explained the doughty dominie. He had to his credit years of successful experience with school trustees and other refractory public bodies, and he knew how to handle them. “I have an idea that if we would go about it in the right way,” he insinuated, “we might get another hundred out of the government.”

Ah! he had hit upon the universal argument, to get something out of the government. There was some discussion, more or less desultory, but it was a foregone conclusion that it would be worth a hundred

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dollars to get a like sum out of the public money-bag. They would take a sporting chance on it.

The correct procedure was, of course, to appoint committees, one to feel out the Minister of Education on the matter, one to solicit the support of the local Member of Parliament, another to engage the Normal School teacher at a minimum fee, and a fourth to choose the prize books. George Black was named a committee of one in each case. Single-handed, he was to pull the wires which were to set this brilliant idea of his in operation and to bring it ultimately to a successful issue.

The teacher proved conclusively the efficacy of small committees, for in a phenomenally short time he had made detailed arrangements for the great event. The Minister had given his approval. Two hundred dollars' worth of books had been purchased and deposited in the great court-room. Mr. Sargent had promised to come for his bare expenses, since they asked it in the name of public education. The date set for the occasion was the gala day of all the year, the twenty-fourth of May, the birthday of the much-loved sovereign, Queen Victoria.

Six months of preparation lay ahead, six months of intensive pedagogical grind. The teachers, knowing well the weakness of juvenile humanity, had agreed that the maximum of stimulus for the contest was to be obtained if the teacher's choice of the three contestants was not revealed until the eve of the great event. Meanwhile, all available means of artificial

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respiration in the dying cause of education were to be applied to all the children of the county. They would be stupid, indeed, who could not acquire in those six months, under pressure, more knowledge than their grandsires possessed after as many decades of the usual intellectual inertia.

The hopes of the teacher at Eby's red school-house were centred in Cyrus Horst, the eldest boy under his tutelage, thirteen, though he looked scarcely ten. It was invariably Cyrus who stood at the head of the row of copper tacks, his bright eyes eager for knowledge and his little body ready to burst with importance. If any boy could bring the coveted honour to his school and to his teacher, it was this brainy, brilliant boy of the Horsts.

From the first intimation of the contest at the red school-house, Cyrus resolved to be the hero of the day, not that he might be a credit to his teacher and to his school, but to cover himself with glory. The boy's ambition was shared and abetted by his mother. It was truly remarkable, she avowed, to what lengths the Lord would go to accomplish His ends, making governments, county councils, principalities and powers bow to His will in order that her Cyrus might be brought to public notice and exalted in the world.

When at last the long-expected day arrived, there was not a cloud in the sky. Never was there such a perfect Twenty-fourth. For years it had been the custom in Ebytown for the village blacksmith to initiate the celebration of the day by striking on his

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anvil, at precisely nine o'clock, as many sounding blows as the good queen had years of life to her credit. But on this occasion the ceremony was postponed until ten o'clock in order that it might coincide with, and add pomp and circumstance to, the auspicious opening of the competition. A great concourse of people had gathered in front of the court-house, standing, as it were, on the tip-toe of expectation, waiting for the day to begin.

Long before the appointed hour the forty-five youthful contestants were in their places. They were all boys, and every mother's son was arrayed in his Sunday best and in his summer underwear. Each eager, shining face betokened a heart palpitating with hope and excitement. On the hour, the smith sounded his salute, the boys told off the strikes—thirty-four, Loyalty and devotion to Britain and to Britain's Queen were voiced first in the measured tones of the national anthem and later in a medley of reverberating cheers. The day was off to a good start.

Then the massive doors of the court-house were swung open, and into the court-room crowded an audience of retainers representing fifteen schools. The contestants filed in one by one, each one wearing on his chest a placard of cardboard bearing his number, the ominous thirteen being omitted as a concession to the superstitious. There they stood giving themselves up anonymously to the tender mercies of the presiding examiner.

Mr. Sargent had a kind face, albeit the firm, relent-

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less jaw of the successful instructor of the young. The jaw itself was obscured from view by a flowing beard, but the boys had no reason to doubt its existence. When he stood up to make his announcements, a hush went around the room. He would conduct the examination subject by subject, he said. If any one failed to answer correctly three successive questions in any department of learning, he was down and out, and could not take his place until a new subject was about to be introduced. Every boy, barring none, began straightway to quake in his Sunday boots.

An amused smile broke suddenly over the face of the examiner. He encouraged the boys to dismiss their evident fears and to imagine themselves, if they could, back in their own school-rooms. They weren't to be afraid of him: he wasn't an ogre. It was his duty, not to discover the countless things they didn't know, but rather to give them an opportunity to demonstrate how great a fund of useful knowledge they had been able to accumulate in six short months.

A grin of amused appreciation passed around the room.

"What's an ogre?" The first question was a general one.

Cyrus screwed up his courage and said: "It's a chiant, please, sir."

"Correct!" cried Mr. Sargent, his smile breaking now into a laugh. "Give Number Twelve one point for a good start."

The committee of one made the secretarial record.

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Cyrus stood ready to explode with pride and consequence.

Mr. Sargent was scratching his head, propounding, it would seem, some weighty question to floor them all. But the poser proved to be one of a very elementary variety. "Who discovered America?"

"Christopher Columbus," was the unanimous response, loud and certain.

This time no credits were given. "I think we are ready now," said Mr. Sargent. "I have found out that you all have tongues in your heads, a very necessary adjunct to an oral examination. I shall question now in numerical order, beginning with Number One. How many wives had Henry the Sixth of England?"

"Eight," was the immediate and cheerful reply.

"Wrong! He was a minor and never married."

The audience for the most part appreciated the joke, but Number One's boon companions and all the teachers cast anxious, furtive glances at each other. The latter did not approve of that nefarious brand of trick question affected by some members of the profession who ought to know better.

It became alarmingly evident that Mr. Sargent's questions were not to be lightly regarded. Nobody ever got a second chance, for the same question was never put twice, even in another form. The imperfect answer he corrected himself, thereby dragging into the examination hall what some considered an inordinate passion for instruction.

Cyrus stood high in general information. He

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answered all his questions with remarkable accuracy and precision, and at the end of the period he was one of the few who stood flushed and triumphant in the long, thin line.

Arithmetic was next. A huge, white sheet hung over the wall in front; and when Mr. Sargent had pulled it to one side, there was revealed an improvised blackboard covered with problems, embracing a great range of mathematical difficulties, the reduction of trillions of square inches to square miles, the multiplication of decimals and the division of the product by their differences, the computing of interest compounded at usury rates, the manipulation of absurd fractions. The boys' slates measured eight by ten inches and had only two sides, so that the question of space was in itself an awkward problem in mensuration.

At noon the boys were dismissed until two for food and recreation. Many who had brought lunches with them gulped them down instantaneously, and went off on a mad chase over Mr. Frederick Gaukel's two-and-a-half-acre benefaction, singing from time to time the classic sing-song that belonged to the day:

“It's the twenty-fourth of May,
The Queen's birthday:
If we don't get a holiday,
We'll all run away.”

That was the proper way, they thought, to celebrate the glorious Twenty-fourth.

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Alone, in secluded corners, far from the hilarity of their over-confident opponents, a few anxious ones sat with their noses poked in the fifth reader of the Irish National School-books. A marvellously informing volume it was, too, that text of an earlier day, with instruction on history, ancient and modern, sacred and profane, natural philosophy, a smattering of the science of the day under such headings, as astronomy, hydrostatics, pneumatics, optics, chemistry, electricity, galvanism, magnetism, all of which were mel-
lowed to a melodious conclusion by thirty pages of poetry. Very informing, to be sure, but a surfeit on a holiday.

Sarah had insisted that Cyrus should go home for dinner, if only to inform her of his successes. Successes he had had, assuredly, he was happy to say, but this was no time to elaborate on them. He bolted his food and hurried back to the excitement of the school-room. His mother could wait.

Mr. Sargent was in excellent humour when he greeted the boys in the afternoon. The arithmetic had been at once a surprise and a satisfaction, no fewer than twenty having made a hundred per cent. There was one slate in particular which he wished he could take back with him to the Normal School. It was a credit to any school.

Young Cyrus pricked up his ears. In full view of the assemblage he patted himself upon the back. The slate in question was his, of course.

The afternoon session was devoted to literature,

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including reading, literary interpretation, and the recitation of poetical gems. There were questions about Abou Ben Adhem, Shylock, the Red Cross Knight, and many more of the storied people of literature, whom their teachers had held up as examples or as warnings. Each boy said his little piece. Cyrus's teacher had selected for him a poem that hadn't a "j" from beginning to end, but for all that he stumbled terribly over several other linguistic snags his tongue was heir to. Fortunately, he didn't realize just how it sounded to the unaccustomed ears of Mr. Sargent.

But the proceedings of the day paled into insignificance compared with the spectacular spelling-match, which was staged for the evening programme. On this occasion, the court-room was packed to the doors by many of the leading citizens of Ebytown. The boy performers stood around the walls looking like so many timid sheep, placarded for a county fair.

Above everything else in the pedagogical world, Mr. Sargent loved a spelling match, and he never called a halt until he had spelled down the last boy. When he appeared on the platform bearing an unabridged edition of Webster's unwieldy dictionary, the very air was charged with expectant excitement.

Was it "ie" or "ei", "able" or "ible", two "c's" and one "s", or vice versa? One boy here and another there dropped in his tracks in the terrible onslaught and was borne off, wounded in pride and spirit, to his consoling friends; and yet there was a thin, straight line who did not waver. It was a marvel how some of the

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shortest boys could wiggle their way through the most elongated verbifications and stand their ground undaunted in the face of the sulphurous words which the examiner boomed at them like balls from the mouth of a thundering cannon.

When he had reduced the enemy to ten, Mr. Sargent called them "the invincibles", and summoned them to the front of the room. From that moment the battle, now at closer range, became more intense. The most deadly ammunition was brought forth and hurled ruthlessly right and left. A terrible slaughter ensued.

Only two survived, Cyrus Horst, the smallest of the forty-five original contestants, and a big, shambling, Scotch lad from Shade's Mills. They were pitted against each other, now, to the death. Mr. Sargent was little more than an instigator, throwing at them the fuel which incited both to impassioned fury.

"Receive."

"R-e-c-e-i-v-e."

Siege."

"S-i-e-g-e."

"Seize."

"S-e-i-z-e."

Would it never end?

"Diphtheria."

"D-i-p-t-"

"Down!" cried Mr. Sargent.

A great volume of shouts mingled with groans from the audience. The vanquished Scot dropped

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into inconsequence, and Cyrus Horst stood alone, the undisputed hero of the hour.

"Spell him down, too," cried the revengeful contingent from Shade's Mills.

Cyrus tossed his head contemptuously. It was one thing to suggest and another to accomplish, his very manner declared.

"If only he wouldn't show so big off," whispered Ephraim to Levi Gingerich.

"If they would have examination in common sense," was Levi's idea, "mebbe then they could learn him some."

Mr. Sargent took up the task of spelling Cyrus down, but he soon found that it was not an easy one. The child seemed to have a phenomenal instinct which guided him safely past all the perilous reefs known to orthography. He spelled words he had never pronounced, words of which he did not know the meaning. It was almost uncanny the way that boy could spell. The audience sat with bated breath, dumb with admiration.

"Try him with easy ones," suggested Mr. Black, whose hope and interest in the spelling match had died when his star pupil was laid low with "diphtheria".

"Lose," propounded the examiner.

"L-o-o-s-e," spelled Cyrus.

"Down, at last!" was the jubilant cry. "You spelled 'loose'."

Cyrus made a wry face and dropped out of sight.

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He was mortified, chagrined. To have spelled through the dictionary and stumbled on a word of one syllable!

Mr. Sargent had the floor, and he took the opportunity to congratulate the boys and their teachers. There was no need to fear for a country that had such men in the making, he said, and such men to make them. The boys he encouraged to continue their studies in the grammar school and their instructors, he suggested, might attend the Normal School to their profit. A new day was dawning in the educational world, and it behooved them all to press towards the light.

The interest of the teachers and pupils alike was centred not so much in Mr. Sargent's helpful advice as in the import of the document which "plain George Black" held in his hand. A hum of excitement prevailed when the time came for him to give his report. His statements were bald enough, no danger of misapprehension. The most brilliant pupil had won fifteen books for his school. The red ribbon went to Number Twelve.

A round of hearty applause. Two blocks down Frederick Street the echo could be heard.

"Here, Number Twelve," cried Mr. Sargent. "Let me have the honour of pinning the badge on you."

Loud and prolonged cheers. Cyrus edged his way to the platform.

"What's your school?"

"Eby's, if you please, sir," replied Cyrus. Pride

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beamed in the faces of the teacher and the other boys of the little red school-house.

"And your name?"

"Cyrus Horst."

"A kingly appellation," said Mr. Sargent, patting the boy on the back. "You won the first credit of the day, and you have won the last. I hope you will not *lose* in the battle of life."

Everybody laughed and whispered the emphasized word. Cyrus felt that his inflation of self-esteem had been somehow pricked. He uttered a confused "Yes, sir", and left the platform.

The report went on to say that while the first prize had gone to Eby's school, the majority of awards had been earned by the Scotch boys of the south. It was gratifying to know, too, that there was not a school represented but had won some prizes. The numbers and names of the winners were read and the prizes allotted. It was the concensus of opinion that the contest had done much to advance the cause of education by standardizing the curricula and by giving a stimulus to study. They must have another next year.

Then came the votes of thanks. Mr. Black, Mr. Sargent, The Minister of Education, and the county council,—even the obliging blacksmith—all received their meed of praise. For fear that someone might have been unintentionally overlooked, a general vote of appreciation was tendered to those who had shown their interest by their attendance that evening, and to

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all others who had helped in any way to make the occasion such an unqualified success.

It was all over but "God Save the Queen" when up jumped Dr. Scott with the request that he be allowed to address a few words to the boys who had participated in the contest. After all, this was their fête; the grown-ups were merely spectators. He had something up his sleeve that he wanted to show the boys. It was no metaphor he used, either, for he actually began to draw something from the armhole of his coat-sleeve.

Every eye was fixed on the good doctor. The dropping of the proverbial pin could have been heard in the farthest corner of the room.

To the view of the astonished boys the conjurer displayed a string of shining, jingling medals, some gold, some silver, some brass. "In Scotland," he said, "it is not polite to talk about oneself, but to-night I am in Canada. These are the medals I won in the auld land. They are not all gold, but even the brass ones represent my best effort while I was a student at the great university. They are not worth muckle in actual money, but they are my most treasured possessions."

"Dr. Scott is a very wealthy man," interjected one of the teachers.

That was evidently not the impression that the doctor had intended to leave, for he went on to elaborate quite a different idea. "Every boy before me has the ability to win medals and honours from the world," he said. "But it means sacrifice. Remember

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we are not here in this world to kill time, for it is not ours to kill. Ony day, ony moment, we may be called away. Prepare yourselves day by day, laddies, to live useful lives. It is only what you do for others that counts. Leave the auld world better than you found it, and you shall not have lived in vain. Ten o'clock. You ought to be in your beds."

These words created a profound impression not only with the boys, but with their elders, for everyone knew that the doctor lived the doctrines he preached. But it was the glittering array of medals that caught the popular eye. Old and young alike pushed their way up the aisle to inspect them.

"Ain't it wonderful," said one. "All of them medals for one man. He must have the head though."

"He can have his medals," said another, "if he would give me what he has in the bank."

Cyrus Horst looked upon the tokens with covetous eyes. "I wish they would 've given me a medal, me that earned it," he confided to a friend, "instead of books for the school."

The meeting dispersed at length with expressions of satisfaction on every hand. The contest had been to many a marvellous revelation of the great, unexplored depths of human knowledge, and of the remarkable facilities at hand in these latter days for penetrating into it. They didn't have such advantages thirty, twenty, or even ten years ago.

It was a triumphant and self-satisfied boy who climbed up into the back seat of the family democrat

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that evening when it was time to go home. Compared with him, Ephraim and Levi, who sat in front, were as grasshoppers. But just as Levi picked up the reins, something happened that disturbed the equilibrium of Cyrus's mind, for the moment at least. A group of boys who were standing about the court-house door raised their voices and with loud and united cry they shouted, "Good-night, Lucy!"

"Who's your girl?" cried someone from out of the darkness. "Lucy who?"

"Don't you know?" came back the reply. "Lucy Horst."

There was a school-boy snigger, another "Good-night, Lucy!" and a boisterous shout of derisive laughter.

Cyrus bit his lip. He was glad enough for the cover of darkness. One of the group, only, he recognized—the big, Scotch boy who had been his rival in the spelling match. "Good-night, Diphtheria," he retaliated. "I hope you are dead with it till you come home."

"Shame!" cried Ephraim, his cheeks burning for his shameless brother.

Levi jerked the reins and told the horses to go on.

* * * *

Sarah was unconscionably proud of her boy when she heard the good news of his success. Cyrus had to explain to her in detail how he got ahead of the others. He had stood first, he was sure, in every subject and

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naturally his average was highest. It was the average that counted.

Sarah stopped him short. "The average," she said sharply. "What's that?"

"It's what the teachers struck," Cyrus told her.

"Did you see them?"

"In the corner they did all the figuring," said the boy.

"And what is an average?" said Sarah. "Tell me that."

Cyrus looked the contempt that he felt for her. "Such ignorance!" he hooted. "Don't you know yet what an average is?" And leaving the moot question unanswered, he continued the narrative of his triumphs.

Before Sarah dropped to sleep that night she found an opportunity to say to Noah, "That chust shows you what edication is—real edication. Look at how long I had to ask what an average is, and who tells me at last? Not my doddy, or my dumm man, but my bubby, my edicated bubby. You have to give in now that Cyrus is smarter than all of you. He's the peacock, Nooi, he's the peacock of the family."

CHAPTER IX

Honour and Dishonour

WHEN spring was warming into summer, Bishop Benjamin Eby's health began to fail, and soon grave fears were entertained for his recovery. Dr. Scott attended him day by day, but to no avail. His heart, it seemed, had "went bad on him".

This was the time to extol the virtues of the good man. There was nobody but respected and loved him. His mental attainments, his genuine culture, and above all his kindly, unselfish, Christian character—these were the attributes which he exemplified, these were the impressions that would live on in the memories of the people long after his mortal life should have ebbed away.

Few men have served their communities as Bishop Eby had served Ebytown. It was he who in the day of small things, in 1807, to be exact, had brought over from Pennsylvania the first great caravan of conestogas. On his property and under his supervision were built the first church and school, and he was at once the first preacher and teacher. No one ever came to him in need and was turned empty away, for he imparted not only spiritual admonition but temporal relief. He was, moreover, an industrial pioneer. On

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his farm was erected the first factory, the forerunner of many in the industrial life of the village which bore with pride his much-respected name.

The reports became more and more disheartening. The Bishop was sinking fast. He could not outlive the summer. The prediction proved only too true, for towards the end of June he reached the goal of his pilgrimage, and slipped peacefully away into that far-off, mysterious land which awaits the faithful when this life's fitful dream is over.

That was in the day and among the people of large funerals, but never in all the history of Ebytown had there been such a funeral as was accorded the great Bishop. From all over the county flocked the people of every nationality and creed, until the meeting house which he had built was packed to the doors. Four sermons were preached at that service, none of them so vital as the memories of the reasoned logic and the impassioned entreaties of him whom the finger of God had touched.

Then there arose the all-important question of apostolic succession. A bishop they must have, a visible head of the church. But where was the Elisha upon whose unworthy shoulders should fall the cloak of the great prophet? Where, indeed?

The question had been in Sarah's mind for some time. She had often talked to the Lord about it. She never thought about Ben Eby and his exalted position, she told Him, that her own Noah didn't "come into her mind". Could it be possible that it was for this

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very hour that Noah had been brought forth out of Greenbush?

The Mennonites have a unique but very scriptural method of according the Lord the privilege of the final choice in the selection of the officials of His church. They offer Him a few tentative suggestions, and leave the rest to Him. So to them is the will of the Lord revealed.

The services of Bishop Moyer of the Twenty were secured for the occasion of the ordination. Three of the preachers had been nominated for the office, Josiah Ernst, his son, Simeon, and Noah Horst. There they stood in a row before the pulpit looking very humble and subservient to the divine will. Three new hymn-books were brought in, one for each of the candidates; and these were arranged on the pulpit. Everyone knew that the fateful words, "Ordained to be a bishop", were inscribed on the fly-leaf of one of the volumes, but which one it was, not even the presiding bishop who wrote them could affirm. After an earnest prayer for guidance, the preachers were asked to choose, in turn, one of the books. At a sign from the presiding officer, all three volumes were opened. The sacred charge was found in Noah's book.

"Nooi!" gasped Sarah, who had been watching her husband narrowly for some confirmation of her hopes.

"The Lord has chosen Preacher Horst for His bishop," said Bishop Moyer, placing his ecumenical hand in blessing upon Noah's head, as the latter

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dropped on his knees before him. "May He make you worthy."

"Amen," was the universal response.

So Noah Horst, late of Greenbush, became bishop of the Mennonite Church in Ebytown.

Of all the good wishes that were showered upon the new head of the church, none were more sincere than those of the wife of his bosom. Sarah was satisfied beyond her most roseate dreams, and her confidence in the Lord was confirmed. Her husband—her "Nooi"—a bishop! "That's why me and the Lord had to fetch you out of Greenbush," she said, triumphantly, when she had him alone. "Look what we led you into."

"Ach, yes, it is so," admitted Noah, yet without enthusiasm. It seemed to him that he could feel the suggested halter about his neck. A haunting fear for the future overshadowed him. He wondered how he could hope to be a successful leader of his people, when his own sons and daughters were breaking away one by one from his parental authority.

"You mean Ephraim?" said Sarah.

"He runs with the Meddedischts," he told her.

"Leave him," advised Sarah. "He never was no good."

"And Esther, she's left off her bonnet."

"She'll put it on again," promised Sarah. "You can let that to me."

"Cyrus he makes me a lot of worry."

"Cyrus!" cried the boy's mother, with derisive

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laughter. "Now that chust shows you how dumm you are to fret." She painted for him again the glowing picture which always hung prominently on the walls of her imagination, Cyrus exalted in the esteem of his fellow-men, the flower of his father's family, the joy and hope of his mother. No need to worry about her Cyrus.

But Noah did not care to follow his wife on these flights of fancy. He sat beside the kitchen stove and stared vacantly into space. Never in all his experience with her had she so irritated him. When at last she went off to bed, he fell upon his knees and poured out his troubled soul in prayer. To God alone could he tell his fears for Cyrus. He would understand that he did not want to coerce Esther into wearing the bonnet, or to restrain Ephraim in his honest conviction that he ought to offer his life on the altar of the Methodist church as a missionary to Japan. They were his children; he, their father, but never their judge. For Lydia and Manassah he prayed that he might have them, at least, as souls for his hire. He brought Sarah, too, before the Throne of Grace, and invoked a blessing for her. But his most earnest prayer was for his own sinful self. It was entirely his fault, he confessed, that he did not love his wife as he ought. His character was full of blemishes, his conduct full of imperfections. Of himself, he was weak, but his strength was in the Lord. To Him he looked for wisdom and guidance in the new responsibilities of his life. He wanted to be only the humble

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instrument through whom the will of God should operate without restraint, that His great Name might be exalted in the earth.

* * * *

The next year, 1854, was a very eventful one in the history of Ebytown, for it was then that the corporation sloughed off its out-grown garments of village life and arrayed itself as became the dignity and importance of a town.

The occasion was not allowed to pass without fitting notice. Indeed, the first day of the new order was one of protracted celebration. From dawn until the wee small hours of the following morning, the little German band piped and drummed about the streets and in the corridors of the new court-house, where the elite of Ebytown tripped the light, fantastic toe.

The dance was a phenomenal success, scores of pleasure-seekers coming from Shade's Mills to augment the local crowds. The weather was perfect, the music entrancing, the musicians generous. The voice of the caller of dances and the merry laughter of the dancers themselves echoed and re-echoed through the night air. Joy was unconfined. When the refreshments failed, liquid substitutes were provided from a neighbouring saloon. After midnight the crowd began to thin out, but the noise became disproportionately deafening. Two hours more and the little German band packed up and decamped, leaving the stragglers no alternative but to go home. Some of them were in no condition

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to go anywhere. A prominent woman had to be carried to her carriage by her half-tipsy husband, with the unfortunate result that he dumped her into a puddle, thereby ruining both her finery and her reputation. Everybody was talking about it on the streets the next morning.

"Ain't it awful?" said Noah, when the story had been bruited to his ears. "What do they do it for?"

"Ach, I guess they want to have a good time," said the purveyor of the delectable tale. "They must be happy."

"Happy!" hooted Noah. "Don't they know how to be happy yet? They don't have to be pigs."

"They don't know that, 'tseems," was the reply. "But if I was you, Bishop, I'd keep my mouth shut till I knew once who was all there. You don't mind me telling. . .?"

Noah was gone. The next minute he was driving like mad down Frederick Street.

Ephraim came to open the gate for him.

"Where was you last night?" demanded Noah.

"To home," replied the lad. "Me and Levi were studying for the Latin examination."

"Where was Cyrus?"

"To home, too," Ephraim supposed.

"Where is he now?"

"Dunno."

Noah threw the reins to his son and strode to the house. "Where was you last night?" he demanded of the astonished Esther.

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"Why, I was to home, like always."

"You didn't sneak out in the night?"

Esther stared at him blankly.

"Where was that Rhoda Starling?"

"Rhoda?" said Esther, "Why, she was going to the ball."

"You stop away from her," commanded Noah.

"She don't do you no good. Where's Cyrus?"

At this moment Sarah bustled down the stairs and into the kitchen. She was flustered and excited.

Noah threw the question at her, "Where's Cyrus?"

"He's in bed," answered Sarah.

"In bed! It's ten o'clock."

"He's sick," protested the woman. "He's throwed up awful."

"He's drunk," shrieked Noah. "Drunk! Fifteen years old, and drunk! My God, has it come to this?"

Sarah turned as white as a sheet. Drunk? Her Cyrus-boy? Never! She could explain it all. "He was over to Ernsts' all night," she declared, "with Daniel. He ate something that didn't set good on his stomach." She believed they ought to send for Dr. Scott.

"I'll doctor him," announced Noah. In all his life he had never been so furious. "I'll thrash it out of him. I'll learn him to fetch disgrace on us like that." He had seized the broomstick and was making for the stairway.

"Nooi!" screamed Sarah, throwing herself bodily at her husband. "Stop! Me you can thrash, but him you must not touch." [166]

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Esther was sobbing helplessly, hysterically, in the middle of the room.

"It's your fault," cried Noah, trying in vain to push the exasperated woman aside. "You spoilt him."

"You spoilt him yourself," retorted Sarah. She followed Esther's example and took a woman's refuge in a torrent of tears.

Noah had a tender heart. He let Sarah have the broom, and he felt himself being shoved into his arm-chair. He was all in a tremble. Tears streamed from his eyes. He clutched the chair and tried to pull himself together. The next minute he did not know what he was doing. Where was he, anyway?

"He's dead!" moaned Sarah, on the verge of hysteria. "It's me, Nooi! Don't you know me?"

Esther called Ephraim and sent him post-haste for the doctor.

A slight stroke, the doctor said it was. Fifty-four was young for that sort of thing. Was he worrying about something?

"Nothing," Sarah told him. "At least, nothing much."

"I thought I saw him in town half an hour ago."

"Yes, he was down," replied Sarah, "and when he came home he went chust like that."

"Strange," the doctor thought. "Everybody else well?"

"Yes," said Sarah, without so much as a tremor in her voice.

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"I didn't see you at the ball last night, Mrs. Horst."
A playful little gibe.

"Such carryings-on is not for us," replied Sarah.

The doctor turned, looked at her closely and said, "They are not always good for young people, that I know. Now don't let your guid man worry. Keep him quiet, and we'll soon have him around again."

As soon as opportunity afforded, Sarah asked Simeon Ernst if Daniel was sick, too, the night of the ball.

He was, Simeon remembered. His mother had said it would be a long time before she would allow him to go to the Horsts' again for the night.

Sarah's jaw fell. "Wasn't Cyrus over to your place?" she asked, feebly.

"No, Daniel was here, not?"

Sarah shook her head.

Simeon was forced to the conclusion, "They were both together at some place where they shouldn't ought to 've went." There was no need to be more explicit about it.

"Daniel ain't any too good company for Cyrus," observed Sarah. "He learns him bad things."

"It don't take much to spoil a bad egg," Simeon shot back at her. "Mebbe you can think out what that means." It was a tactless speech, which did not discredit Cyrus in the least, although it cost Simeon himself a sudden drop in the esteem of his mother-in-law.

* * * *

Prosperity came to Ebytown with its new civic

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dignity. Those were the days when the war-clouds hung heavy in Europe, and famine stalked about the Crimea. But the farmers of Ebytown saw only the silver lining. For them the distress of Europe meant only an inflation in the price of their great commodity, wheat. The grain which they had stored in their barns the previous autumn brought fabulous prices, and the farmers were jubilant. Next year there was another bountiful harvest and an equally ready sale for their crops. They were getting rich hand over fist.

Phenomenal strides were being made in industry, too, stimulated, as it was, by a great influx of population from the cities of Germany. Refugees from the economic persecutions of the mid-nineteenth century found a safe retreat in the most German town in the British dominions across the seas. Factories sprang up like mushrooms. Before long Shade's Mills had a formidable rival in the output of her industrial plants. A boom was on in Ebytown. Property increased in value, prosperity was in the air, success seemed easier than failure.

A new day had dawned in social life as well. The privations of pioneer life were passing away, and all manner of luxuries were being spirited into the homes of the people under the guise of necessities. New days, new ways. With the money that had formerly been spent in clearing more land the women now bought pretty dresses for themselves and for their children, and nick-nacks to give an air of distinction to the home. Old-fashioned candles and their accessories

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were being relegated to the shelf in the cellar, and their time-honoured places were being usurped by new, nobby, coal-oil lamps. These were not always as pleasing to the nose as to the eye, but it was considered good form to practice indulgence in this connection. It was after all an evidence of advancing civilization.

Mr. Collins felt that it was incumbent upon him to see that education did not lag in these days of prosperity and optimism. He had a vision of a new school in the heart of the little town, a real school, large enough to accommodate not only all the elementary pupils of the community but his grammar school students as well. In two years this dream was an accomplished fact. A splendid new red-brick school of eight rooms was erected on Frederick Street, within a stone's throw of the court-house. Every morning the sonorous bell in its cupola pealed forth merrily the claims of education, a joyous invitation always, never a summons to duty.

But the great surprise of the decade was sprung when it was noised about that Ebytown was to have a weekly newspaper. Henry Eby, son of the late Bishop, was to publish it, and its name was to be *The Ebytown Announcer*. The initial number contained an outline of its policy, a dash of rather doubtful poetry, news rehashed from distant lands, a short list of the paid-up subscribers, a longer one of the prospective recipients of unclaimed mail at the local post-office, and a variety of advertisements, including everything from snuff to whipple-trees. All this, and the chance of seeing one's

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own name in print from time to time, for two dollars a year, delivery to be made by a courier on horseback, to avoid the excessive postal rates, and payment expected only when, and as, convenient.

It was *The Announcer* that first hinted at the possibility of a railroad for Ebytown. The issue which contained this information was entirely exhausted on the very day of its publication. Here was news, vital news, for the whole community. A railroad would mean that the products of Ebytown's factories and of its farms could be shipped away without the inconvenience of hauling them to the train at Shade's Mills. In numberless ways it would spell progress to Ebytown. Long and spirited conferences were held to discuss the project. There was a period of strained anxiety but finally came the confirmation of their hopes. The railroad would pass through Ebytown. "Now," said the proud promoters of the enterprise, "watch Ebytown grow."

The track was to be laid diagonally through the bush end of the Horst farm. The engineers came first and surveyed the roadbed. A motley crowd of navvies followed and laid the ties and, on them, two parallel rows of steel rails. The Horsts had to feed and house the men. They were glad enough when they saw them throw their shovels over their shoulders, wave their farewells, and move on to the next farm.

For the better part of a year the rails stood unused. They never would be used, some maintained. It was a mad scheme at best. Didn't they know how hard it

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was to keep an intelligent horse in a narrow roadbed? A huge, horseless machine on rails? Never! It was nothing short of an open defiance to Almighty God.

But the day came when *The Announcer* reported that the railroad was completed, and that the date had been set for its formal opening. The first train to pass over the rails would bring to Ebytown several government officials who had sponsored the project in Parliament and a few railway experts who had been instrumental in carrying their ideas into fulfilment. The party would stop at Ebytown for several hours to give the citizens an opportunity to express their appreciation of the great public service. The work had been done most thoroughly and most expeditiously; the last tie would be laid, the last rail in its place before the election. That was a matter for sincere congratulation.

Elaborate preparations had been made for the visit of the dignitaries. Fortunately, the day was fair, and long before the time set for the arrival of the train the welcoming crowds had congregated on either side of the track. They had waited for hours, it seemed, when at last the engine came screeching in, like a huge, black demon, belching forth clouds of dense, black smoke. Would the monster bounce off the rails and run amuck, or would it, perhaps, appease its hunger, or its wrath, or whatever it was that ailed it, by sucking into its power some unwary victim? There were those, foolhardy ones, who waved defiant arms and tried to outscreech the brute, but the staid, sensible

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majority stood staring in awed silence, as they might in the presence of some embassy from another world.

The uncanny thing stopped, sure enough, at the very spot where Dr. Scott and a group of town councillors stood in frock coats and silk hats, pulling their beards nonchalantly, as if this sort of thing happened every day. The notables alighted from the train, the little German band struck up a martial air, a parade was formed, and the politicians and their companions were driven into, and duly introduced to, Ebytown.

Ephraim Horst and Levi Gingerich remained behind to inspect the mechanism of the great engine.

"Don't it beat all?" said Ephraim.

"Don't it?" acquiesced Levi. "These are wonderful days we live in. What won't we get all in Ebytown next?"

Ephraim allowed his fancy to run wild. "Some day mebbe we'll drive our own trains around in the streets," he said.

"Tracks?" said Levi.

"Mebbe we won't need tracks," suggested Ephraim. "From Toronto already this came without horses."

Levi shrugged his shoulders, skeptically. "Mebbe we'll fly around in the air like on eagles' wings," he said, poking innocent fun at his friend.

The engineer who had been listening to this conversation with no little interest cried out jovially: "Say, how long do you fellows think you are going to live,

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anyway? Those things won't happen in a thousand years."

Ebytown entertained its guests right royally. After a tour of the public buildings, the men were taken in small groups to the homes of prominent citizens for dinner and a social hour. The mass meeting was at two o'clock in front of the court-house. On a huge, temporary platform the visitors expressed their surprise and delight in the remarkable enterprise of Ebytown. In equally complimentary terms Dr. Scott voiced the municipality's appreciation of the foresight of the legislators. It was a sort of mutual admiration society meeting which gave everyone a comfortable, well-fed feeling.

It was hoped that the visitors would spend the night in Ebytown, and in anticipation of this event, a brilliant ball had been arranged. The lions of the day, however, excused themselves on the plea that they were expected that evening in the next town. It was with the utmost difficulty that they finally tore themselves away. Ebytown was disappointed. The grand ball had lost much of its significance.

Early in the day, Cyrus Horst dropped the remark that he intended to take Elsa Reiber to the dance.

"Elsa Reiber? Her that works at Starlings'?" inquired his mother.

"Yes, her. She's crazy about me."

"She's Lutheran!" protested Sarah, with uplifted hands.

"I don't care what she is," replied Cyrus. He

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paused a moment to part his sprouting moustache and added, "I'm only playing with her, anyway."

"But you will burn your fingers," Sarah warned him. "Stop away from her, Cyrus."

"Stop your tongue!" sneered his mother's pride and delight. "I'm not going to marry her."

Manassah had overheard the conversation, and could not refrain from adding his comment. "A young man that trifles with a girl's love is a coward," he said. "Elsa Reiber is too good for the likes of him, she can be who she is."

The philanderer made a wry face and told Manassah rather emphatically that he had enough to do to mind his own business.

In spite of the protestations and entreaties of the entire family, the son of much prayerful concern attended the dance with Elsa Reiber, Mrs. Starling's hired girl. Now Elsa was a pretty girl, and she danced beautifully. In Cyrus's eyes, she eclipsed both Rhoda and Veronica Starling, who had evidently set out to be the belles of the evening.

All went well until the girl smelled liquor on her escort's breath. Then she noticed that he was beginning to talk foolishly. Elsa was chagrined. "If you drink any more, Lucy, I'm going home," she threatened.

Cyrus laughed. "Some fool must have mixed the drinks," he said. "On with the dance!"

He came to her again, actually reeling. His hair was dishevelled, his necktie awry. The dancers smiled and looked away.

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"The bishop's son!" said one.

"At seventeen!" added another.

"Yes, a Mennonite bishop's son!" said the first.

Elsa drew Cyrus gently but firmly out of the crowd

"What's s'matter?" he growled.

"We're going home, Lucy."

"Yes we are when I get good and ready."

"But I'm sick."

"What d'you go and get sick for?" drawled Cyrus. "Go home yourself."

Elsa was strong, and with much muscular persuasion she finally induced Cyrus to leave the hall with her. They sat outdoors on the steps for a time, and then she cajoled him into taking her home.

But in reality it was Elsa who took Cyrus home, supporting him all the way with her strong, right arm. They passed the Starling home without so much as looking in, Elsa, silent, sure-footed, and thoughtful, and Cyrus, babbling and staggering in his drunken stupor. Right to the Horst house she led him, and pounded at the great front door.

Sarah was up and waiting for her boy, and at the sound of his coming she ran and opened the door. There lay Cyrus, the son of her dreams, huddled on the step in a heap of brutish dissipation. His companion was hurrying down Frederick Street.

"Lutherian!" Sarah shouted after her. "You made him this way."

Noah came and helped Sarah get Cyrus to bed.

"It's her fault," Sarah told him. "The best ain't

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ever safe in such company. To fetch us such disgrace already."

"It's not her I'm thinking about, nor us either," replied Noah, after a long pause. "It's him—Cyrus. I didn't fetch him up right. It's my fault. My God, forgive me."

Sarah was astounded. "That's a different story you've got to-night," she said. "You always laid it to me that I spoiled him."

Noah did not answer. He reached for his cap and slipped out into the darkness of the night.

The next morning Sarah noticed that Noah was beginning to look like an old man.

CHAPTER X

An Ideal Shattered

THE awkward, raw-boned Esther Horst developed so well that at twenty-two she was plump and rosy, and altogether attractive. A wealth of curly, black hair wreathed her face becomingly and crowned a tall, well-proportioned figure. There was a certain indefinable dignity about the girl that made strangers turn and look at her the second time.

Esther had become, hopelessly, a Methodist. Lured into Rhoda's church in the susceptible days of her childhood, she had long since laid aside her bonnet and with it the religion of her parents. Her mother had tried to save her, but too late. A mighty, rousing revival had come along, and Esther had been ruthlessly caught and carried into the membership of the Methodist Church.

It happened at one of a series of protracted meetings which Rhoda and Esther had attended out of sheer curiosity. They sat in the back seat. From the moment they entered the church the preacher had set his seal upon them. With great earnestness he portrayed the horrors of hell and damnation, and pointed out the narrow, up-hill road that led, he said, to life eternal. Esther's heart was strangely moved. No sooner was the invitation offered than she ran sobbing

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to the altar. Rhoda came and knelt beside her. From all quarters came the penitents with tears and confession, little children, gray-haired men, flagrant sinners of the community, and luke-warm officials of the church. There they were, all of them, snatched mercifully from the mouth of the fiery, brimstone pit and garnered into the safety of the fold, while the anxious rescuers stood by murmuring excited hallelujahs of praise.

"When will you start to backslide?" asked Sarah, when Esther told her mother of the wonderful experience that had come into her life. She knew those Methodists, if Esther didn't, a worldly, hypocritical lot, running now with the devil and his crowd, and then up to the altar to get converted over again. They were all alike, each worse than the next.

"Ephraim didn't backslide yet," said Esther.

Sarah's answer was little better than a hoot. "Ephraim! How can he slide down till he is up once?"

"He wants to be a missionary yet," protested Esther.

"And if he goes to that college, it don't go long till he's a wicked infidel," Sarah was sure. "That's the start of backsliding, them colleges. They pick the Bible apart, and they think they know more than them that wrote it."

Esther was constrained to remind her mother that she had encouraged Cyrus in his educational pursuits.

"Ach, Cyrus," said the too-fond mother, "he's smart like never was. They couldn't fool him with

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their infidel ideas. But Ephraim's dumm—dummer yet than you. Him and you will go with the crowd."

Esther knew the antidote for the besetting sin of the Methodists. "You must work at your religion," the preacher had told his converts that memorable evening at the altar. "You must work and pray, or you will lose it all. You have saved your own souls: help now to save others. Forget yourselves and think of your neighbours. The greatest joy there is in life is the joy you give to some one else. The Christian religion means sacrifice. Every man goes down to death bearing in his clutched hands only what he has given away."

Esther lost no time in getting to work at her new-found religion. She offered to teach a Sunday-school class, and she threw herself whole-heartedly into the training of the little girls committed to her charge. She joined the choir, too, and with her deep, contralto voice she sang out the happiness that filled her heart. But Rhoda was different. She refused to teach in the Sunday-school; she wouldn't sing in the choir—couldn't, she said, but whether it was the voice or the joy she lacked, she did not say.

There were others who did the work that Rhoda declined to do. Esther's religious enthusiasm was stimulated by association with other young people of the church, and especially by contact with the much-admired Gideon Bomberger. Gideon was the joy of the preacher's heart. He always had a helping hand and a cheerful countenance. He was the leading tenor

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in the choir, and he taught what was once the most obstreperous class in the Sunday-school. But whether he was singing divinely, or teaching humanely, or merely handling groceries over his father's counter, he was the same genial, obliging Gideon, the most popular young man of the village.

Gideon's father, on the other hand, was far from popular, being a crusty old individual who had always had, and still proposed to have, his own unmolested way. He had wealth, but with it avarice; he had a beautiful home, but no friends to enjoy it with him.

A rather unsavoury story regarding the elder Bomberger's business tactics leaked out and added not a little to his unpopularity. It was said that, having heard how Absalom Shade began life with a hundred dollars and a box of tools and later acquired great wealth, owning four stores and making profits of at least forty or fifty per cent. on his goods, he hied himself to Shade's Mills to learn, if possible, the secret. He had to work hard, he declared, to make even one per cent. on his merchandise.

"Only one per cent!" Mr. Shade had exclaimed. "Surely you charge more than that."

"No, I don't," Bomberger had affirmed, earnestly. "What I buy for one dollar I can't get more than two for. To get forty and fifty per cent. like you do, I never could."

Mr. Shade explained as well as his risibility would permit. The Dutchman was overcome with chagrin and disappointment. The worst of it was that the

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wretched story followed him home, and from that day all Ebytown called him by a new and very significant name, Old One Per Cent.

Now Gideon was the sole heir to the Bomberger wealth, and when the young man's twenty-fourth birthday had passed and he was still a bachelor with no apparent prospects, Old One Per Cent began to grow alarmed. He finally decided that something must be done about it. Accordingly, he took matters into his own hands, and announced to his son, and to his friends, and to the world at large that Gideon must marry before the end of the year. It went without saying that in this as well as in other matters the paternal will must be obeyed. The marvel was that Old One Per Cent left to Gideon so much as the choice of his own life partner.

There was a flutter among the daughters of the community, a wagging of heads among the matrons. Week after week, the excitement increased. Hope blushed unseen in many a womanly heart. Only Sarah Horst sniffed at the young eligible. "Who'd have him?" she said. "I didn't forget Lizzie Bomberger yet."

For some time Esther had devoted herself assiduously to the cultivation of her garden, with the intent of using it in the great cause of religion. She felt that if she could send flowers with her good wishes to every sick bed she heard of, it would be a very simple, pleasant way to scatter the sunshine of Christianity in a weary, sin-sick world.

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The young gardener was stooping over a bed of budding hyacinths one day when she was startled to hear her own name. She looked up to see Gideon Bomberger hanging somewhat precariously over the pickets of the garden fence. "It's a fine day," he volunteered, cheerily, as usual.

Esther's heart gave a tremendous thump. "If it don't rain," she replied, as casually as she could.

"Would you sell me some for my Sunday-school class?" said Gideon. "I mean flowers, you know. They're sick."

Esther stared blankly at him. "They ain't all sick, are they?" she asked, with deep concern.

Gideon blushed to the roots of his hair. "Peter Watson's got the rheumatiz," he told her. "He likes flowers—the boys do." Why couldn't he say what he had intended to?

"You can have all you want," Esther said, stooping down to pluck her choicest blooms. Gideon scaled the garden fence and helped her. Their fingers touched electrically. It was an ecstatic moment. He left her suddenly, but after that the grass was greener, the air balmier, the sky bluer, life more wonderful. Could this be love, this warm glow that suffused her cheeks and tingled in every sinew of her body?

The next day at the same hour Gideon came again, but Esther was so overcome with maidenly modesty that she did not look up. He hung over the fence for a few minutes, then went on his way without so much as remarking about the weather. Esther's heart was

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heavy with apprehension. Had she done wrong? Should she have spoken? Was anything ever worse than uncertainty, and anything more uncertain than the dawn of love?

On the third successive day Esther strolled in her garden with eager expectancy, cloaked by apparent unconcern. Presently her waiting ear caught a sound. She looked up. It was only Rhoda Starling.

"Hello, Esther!" the girl called out. "Will you give me some flowers? We're getting company from Shade's Mills—rich people." She came through the gate into the garden.

"So?" said Esther, feigning mild interest. She stooped to pick a few saucy daffodils that caught Rhoda's fancy. When she presented them, she seized an opportunity to glance at the fence. Gideon was there, looking not at the flowers, and certainly not at Rhoda, but with his very soul into the depths of Esther's eyes. That moment all uncertainty was gone. More eloquently than words could ever have expressed it, Gideon had told her the sweet message of his love.

"They have two sons—these people that are coming," Rhoda was saying, appearing not to understand either the situation or its significance. But if Esther had been more interested in the countenance of her friend, she might have seen there a cold, calculating sneer.

They chatted about the flowers and the company from Shade's Mills until presently Rhoda said her

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thanks, and good-bye, and followed Gideon into the village.

He came frequently now, Gideon did, not every day but three or four times a week. Sometimes they talked over the fence, sometimes there was a smile or a wave of the hand, but always the consciousness of mutual love and understanding.

One day he asked if he might come to call on her in the evening. Esther stammered assent. Saturday night, she suggested. It poured all Saturday, and when the young lover said, "It's a fine day", at the Horsts' front door, the water was dripping from his Sunday hat and oozing from his best calf-skin boots.

"Come in once and dry yourself," said Noah, hospitably. Inwardly he was wondering what could have brought young Bomberger to the house in that weather.

Sarah did not wonder. She was possessed of a woman's intuition. She knew. It required all the self-control she could command to refrain from uttering some of the stinging epithets she had hurled as a child at Gideon's long-lost mother. Lizzie Bomberger's boy, indeed! Did he think he was going to walk off with her Esther? Let Old One Per Cent keep his dandy son and his mansion, too. She didn't want either of them.

At length Noah grasped the significance of the occasion. He remembered that delightful season when Simeon Ernst came to pay court to Lydia, and a smile of anticipation lit up his face. Gideon was no sooner

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seated in a comfortable chair in front of the kitchen stove than Noah tried to inveigle him into an interesting discussion. He started with Amos. What did Gideon think of him?

"Amos?" said the unsuspecting young man. "Amos who?"

Noah looked at him a trifle reproachfully. "Why, Amos," he said. "Don't you know yet who Amos is? Him that's in the Bible, I mean."

Gideon cleared his throat, affected presumably by the dampness of the night air. Most assuredly, he knew who Amos was.

"Well, who was he then?" challenged Sarah, her whole attitude surcharged with righteous indignation.

Gideon implored the ceiling for help, but none came. "Amos? . . . Why he was . . . wasn't he? Ach, who was he anyway?" His mental apparatus seemed to be in as great a tangle as his unfortunate tongue.

"He was one of the minor prophets," Noah informed him. "He's near at the back of the Old Testament." Then, trying another tack, he said, "That Chob had the trouble though. When it don't go right with me, I like to think about him—Chob."

"Yes, Chob," said Gideon. His mind went through a tall, gymnastic exercise trying to recall what the unfortunate Job's trouble was, but without the desired effect.

"He's dumm," mumbled Sarah, under her breath. "He's like her, Lizzie never did know nothing."

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Esther saw the danger and came boldly to the rescue. "He's the man that had the boils, Gideon," she reminded him. "You know him now, don't you?"

Of course he did, Gideon made haste to affirm, but for the moment he had got him confused with the man that the whale swallowed, or did he swallow the whale?

"That was Chonah," said Esther, trying to laugh. "The whale swallowed him. A whale is too big of a fish, I think, for a man to swallow."

"I know," said the now thoroughly distraught Gideon. "But them Sunday School boys of mine they say a man is too big a swallow for a fish. They mix me all up with their questions."

"And do they leave you be a teacher in the Sunday-school?" exclaimed Sarah, with no intention whatever of concealing her incredulity.

"Of course they do," said Esther, determined, if possible, to put Gideon at his ease. "We learn the Bible all together. None of us know it like we should."

"Meddedischt!" muttered Sarah. "Them and their sparking-school."

Noah had by this time relinquished his laudable efforts at hospitality. This young suitor of Esther's did not interest him. Time was too fleeting to waste on the likes of him. He reached for the boot-jack, pulled off his long boots and retreated to his arm-chair. With his arms folded peacefully over his abdomen and his feet elevated on a footstool, he was

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soon well away, sliding sonorously down the long toboggan slide of sleep.

"I think I must go now," said Gideon. It had been gradually borne in upon his understanding that he had outstayed his welcome.

"Well," said Esther. Her little heart gave a great, disappointed thump. She knew it had not been a satisfactory evening. He would never come again.

"Well," said Gideon. He put on his hat. "Good-night."

"Good-night," replied the girl. She followed him to the front door, trying vainly to emit an inarticulate sentence which stuck in her throat.

"Best hurry," cried Sarah from the kitchen. "It looks like it might come another shower soon. Run!"

The door opened and closed again with a loud clang. The most eligible young man in Ebytown had emerged from the chilly atmosphere of the Horst home into the darkness of a cheerless, rainy night. Only nine o'clock, and not so much as an invitation to come again!

For some time after Gideon's departure not a word was spoken in the Horst home. Noah was awake now, and intent upon his Saturday evening duty of winding the grandfather clock. In her rocking-chair sat Sarah, silent and unfathomable as a sphinx. Esther's heart was filled with anxious fears. She lit her candle and prepared to retire.

The front door opened and in walked Levi Gingerich. He had dropped in, apparently, as he fre-

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quently did, to retail to Esther and her parents the bits of gossip he had picked up in the village. But this evening he had nothing to say.

Sarah looked at him quizzically over her spectacles. "What's the news?" she demanded.

"Gideon Bomberger was out this way," said Levi. "I met him near the school."

"That we know already," remarked Sarah, coldly.

"Was he here, perhaps?"

"Perhaps he was," was Sarah's ill-tempered reply. "Rain and all, he had to come."

Levi asked another question, a rather impertinent one, perhaps, for a hired man. "What did he want?"

"Her," said Sarah, pointing a long, bony index-finger at Esther.

"Her!" ejaculated Levi. "Her! He ain't good enough for her. To tie her shoe-strings yet he ain't good enough."

"That I know, too." This, with much appreciation, from Esther's carping mother.

"He's too dumm for her," said Levi, continuing the arraignment of the defenceless Gideon. "He don't know no more than he has to, and learn he won't."

Noah closed the clock-door with precision. "That's what I say," he applauded. "I tried him with Amos and Chob already, so I know." He turned to Esther and said, "What's the good of having a man if you've got to learn him all the time, or else shame yourself for what he don't know? Why don't you get a man once like Lydy's, a man that can learn you something?"

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"Why don't you stop away from the men altogether?" was Sarah's advice. "You don't need one, with me here, and they fetch you nothing but trouble—men."

"Nothing but trouble," corroborated Levi. "They're nearly as bad as the women. You don't know Gideon, Esther. He's not what he seems. He's all for self. It's him first, and you, ach, well, yes, if there's anything left over."

At this terrible indictment, Esther's smouldering resentment burst into a flame of passion. "It's not true," she cried. "Everybody likes Gideon."

"Everybody likes what he seems to be," conceded Levi.

"You're chealous," Esther flung at him. She picked up her candle and ran up the stairs.

"You'll not get married this year or the next," Levi called after her. "On two steps I heard you trip already."

"Must I ask you when I can get married?" retorted Esther.

"I'd like to ask you," observed Levi.

"You mean you want me yourself?"

"Yes, I want you myself."

"Well, you can want," hooted the girl, from the top-most step. "I hope you'll want for a long time so you'll know good how it feels."

It was an unceremonious good-night. Levi picked up his hat, bade farewell to the old people and went off laughing to his attic room at Manassah's. What

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had he said to Esther? Nothing. It was nothing but a bit of friendly advice. Queer creatures, these girls. With the best of intentions, he was forever displeasing them.

Gideon's ardour withstood miraculously the chill of the Horst reception. He continued to come and look at Esther over the garden fence. He feasted his eyes on her in church, on the street, in the store, everywhere. His very soul seemed to be dangling in those languishing glances which met Esther's now at every turn. It mattered little whether Gideon was at hand or not. She saw his smiles in the stones of the wayside, in the blue of the vaulted sky, saw them even at night when her own eyes were closed in the twilight of sleep. Gideon's eyes seemed to be, like God's, everywhere.

Three months of this delirium of ecstasy had passed by when Esther was brought back to earth by a visit from her old friend, Rhoda Starling. It was weeks since the girls had seen each other. Their lives were busy, they explained, full of other things.

Rhoda's thoughts, certainly, were full of woman's common interest, matrimony. The greetings were scarcely over when she announced boldly and baldly that the desire of her heart was to get married. "You do, too, don't you, Esther?" she said.

Esther supposed that every woman did.

"If only I could find a rich man," gurgled the irrepressible Rhoda.

"A widower, perhaps?" suggested Esther. In her

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mind an abundance of this world's goods seemed to be associated with the eventide of life.

"Yes, a widower, even, if he has cart-loads of money," she replied. "I've stinted myself all my life, and when I get married I'm going to have all the money I can spend." She went off mooning about wealth and its attendant happiness, but came back to earth again with the stipulation that this magnate widower of hers must have no children.

"No children!" cried Esther, genuinely surprised. "Why, then I chust love. More than money I love children."

Rhoda was off again somewhere in the clouds. At last she fixed her roving eyes upon the brightest star in the firmament of the heavens. "If only he could be a Member of Parliament," she sighed.

"Then you'd be happy, you think?" said Esther. "Well, you wouldn't. You won't ever be happy, no time, no where."

Rhoda came back to earth with a jolt. She gaped at Esther with surprise and disapproval.

"Happiness don't come with what we get, but with what we give," proclaimed the young philosopher. "It don't come from money or anything else that's on the outside of us. It grows up inside us." She tried to help her elucidation with gestures. "We make our own happiness, Rhoda."

"Bosh!" exploded that contemptuous young lady of the world, forgetting her dignity in a moment of petulance. "Why don't you marry a preacher?"

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"I would if I loved him," replied Esther quietly.

"Why don't you set your cap for George Robertson? He talks like you do."

"My cap I set for nobody," said Esther.

"Or Peter Sherk might suit you."

"Peter Sherk, I can't stand," said Esther.

"What about Gideon Bomberger?"

Esther's heart stood still. At the very mention of that name a pair of soulful eyes sprang out from nowhere to meet hers. "Gideon's different," she said, trying to speak casually.

"I wouldn't marry him, Esther," said Rhoda. "Not for anything in the world."

"Why not?"

"He's not polished enough," answered Rhoda. She shrugged a shapely shoulder.

"Ach, you and your polish!" cried Esther, burning with indignation and striving vainly to hide it. "Gideon's solid walnut. He don't need polish."

"If he was solid gold, I wouldn't want him," declared the lofty Rhoda. "He acts too common. I'm not a fool, Esther."

They chatted on about less intimate things, Elsa Reiber and her infatuation for Cyrus, Veronica's new velvet dress, the soirée that the Ladies' Aid were giving in the Sunday-school room.

"The what?"

"The soirée. It's a plain, old-fashioned tea-meeting," explained Rhoda, "but they wanted a fancy

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name so more would come. It's twenty-five cents to go."

"And what did you say they called it?"

"A *soirée*. It's French."

Esther was full of impatience. "Why don't they call it what it is?" she cried. "Such style don't suit me."

"You're a little Mennonitish in your ways," Rhoda told her. "I love all sorts of frilly, French things."

"You come from the Mennonites, too," Esther reminded her, but that was something about which Rhoda did not wish to hear.

The two girls went to the *soirée*.

Esther knew the minute Gideon arrived. So did Rhoda. At that precise moment she turned to the girl who sat next her and said in a stage whisper, "Esther is in love. Did you know?"

"Who is it?" cried the whole interested group.

"Gideon Bomberger," Rhoda informed them. "She thinks he's solid walnut."

There was a peal of merry laughter. Esther tried to join in it, but failed dismally. Her cheeks burned, her hands became suddenly cold, she dared not trust herself to look up.

"I believe she is," said one.

"What did I tell you?" said Rhoda, gleefully.

Esther mustered all her self-control, looked up finally and said simply, "I always did like him."

"We all do," spoke up a sympathetic one. She

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paused a moment and then added, "Oh, my heart, here he is now."

Like young Paris, Gideon came, with an apple for the most fair. The girls teased, coaxed and clamoured for it, but Esther sat in confident silence.

It was an exhilarating moment for Gideon. He was the hero of the hour, an ordinary, frail, susceptible male, but a judge, nevertheless, though a self-appointed one, of a splendid array of female beauty and charm. It was a situation to tickle the imagination and flatter the vanity of any mere man. Gideon tossed the coveted prize playfully in the air. When it came down, Rhoda Starling sprang at it, and caught it. "Finders is keepers," she cried jubilantly, while everyone laughed—everyone but Esther.

Gideon did not so much as look at Esther after that. He was much too busy trailing around after Rhoda, dancing attendance on her slightest whim, running her errands, admiring her features and her dress. Finally, he helped her put on her coat and escorted her home. A very agreeable privilege, too, it appeared to be.

Esther went home alone.

When Esther came in, Sarah was still up, sitting in her rocking-chair in the kitchen. "What's wrong?" she said, suspiciously.

"Nothing."

"Nothing? So the Meddedischts learn you to lie yet," taunted Sarah. "Something's wrong. I can tell it at your looks."

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"Gideon was there."

"Ain't he always there?"

"He went with Rhoda Starling."

Sarah laughed outright. "Leave him burn his fingers there once," she cried, exultantly. "It serves them both right."

What with tears and heart-ache, Esther put in a sleepless night. It was as if a great sea had suddenly rolled in between her and every hope of happiness. On the farther shore wandered the faithless Gideon and the treacherous Rhoda with laughter and jest. But Esther sat alone, would sit forever alone, her heart sick with the disappointment of broken friendship and unrequited love. It seemed there never was so dark a day in all the world's history.

Darker days followed when everyone talked of the lovers and their prospects. Esther's heart was heavy enough, but there rankled no envy in it. Before the week was out, she sat down and wrote Gideon a little note. "God bless you and yours always," she said. "From my heart I wish you every happiness. Try to think kindly of me, as I try to think of you. Pray for me, Gideon. You know you started it. Esther."

Three days she waited for an answer. When it came, it did not dissipate the clouds that shrouded her soul.

"Dear Miss Horst": (it ran)

"Never at any time did I do anything I shouldn't. It is all pure fiction, pure imagination.

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I have nothing to hide. If any gossip is circulated to my detriment, I will pay no attention. Those who are near and dear to me will not believe it, and the rest of the world does not count.

GIDEON BOMBERGER."

Esther staggered, caught the table, and finally steadied herself. Was she dreaming? Was she insane? Far away, it seemed, she heard her mother calling, "Esther, come here once."

"Yes, I'm coming," she found words to reply. She braced herself quickly and went to her mother's side.

Sarah had *The Ebytown Announcer* spread out on her lap. She couldn't find her spectacles and she wanted Esther to read an article that Levi had marked for her perusal.

"Levi?" said Esther. "Did he get in the paper this week?"

"No, not him," said Sarah. "Gideon."

(Thump).

"Levi says it don't go long now till his head is on the block. Then we can see how good he can hop."

"Levi didn't say that?"

"He meant that," averred the mother. "Read it yourself."

So Esther found the marked article and read it slowly and steadfastly to her mother.

"Dame Rumour has it that Mr. Silas Bomberger's fine big house is soon to have a new mistress. If there is anything in signs, we must say they look that

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way. We hope Gideon will strike a fine day for the wedding."

"It didn't say when he was getting married," grumbled Sarah. She had no patience with that rag of a newspaper. What good was it, if it couldn't come right out with the news when it was news. She wasn't any wiser for the reading, not a whit.

"You know he's getting married soon," said Esther.

"I knew that long ago," replied Sarah. "I got my news off Levi. You wouldn't tell me. You wanted him yourself."

"Yes, I did," confessed Esther, "but I don't now."

"Did something happen?" queried the curious mother.

"No, nothing," was the reply, "at least not much. I found out he's not what I thought he was."

As soon as she could, Esther slipped away to her bedroom, and pulled the crumpled paper—Gideon's letter—from its place of security in the pocket of her flannel petticoat. She smoothed it out on the bed, and read it again. Then, seized with a grammatical impulse, she counted six pronouns in the first person. Like a hollow echo came to her the memory of Levi's words of warning, "He's all for self. It's him first, and you, ach, well, yes, if there's anything left over." Why, there was the same idea in Gideon's own words—"The rest of the world does not count."

To the kitchen stove Esther carried the cruel missive. Was it, too, a creation of her imagination?

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She tore it from end to end. It sounded like paper, but was it? She dropped it, shred by shred, into the fire, and watched the flames leap up to devour it. It was gone, now, beyond recall, but in Esther's fertile mind its selfish import, its cruel insinuation, its lying words, would never, never die.

Preparations for the great wedding soon became the talk of the town. Rhoda was getting together her "trousseau." French, she explained, and spelled it for her friends. The Bomberger mansion had been remodelled to her liking. Gideon was a darling. He was simply wonderful. She had only to say what she wanted and it was hers. She had never known before what happiness was. A grand wedding-trip to some foreign country, and after that, unadulterated bliss for evermore.

CHAPTER XI

Levi's Adventures

THE fact that Levi Gingerich had never attended school in his life did not necessarily preclude him from the teaching profession. He knew his Latin Grammar, and he had acquired and digested a considerable library of equally formidable books, and borrowed others from Ephraim and his learned friends in Toronto. He was, moreover, the fortunate possessor, in no small degree, of such qualities as industry, perseverance, and initiative, united in a pleasing personality. These were the spurs that brought him in triumph past the Board of Examiners to the master's desk in the Greenbush school-house.

Here was a teacher who loved both teaching and the children he taught. Books, boys and girls, he made them all his friends. When some little bare-foot youngster, who trudged many a weary mile for a ray from the lamp of learning, lifted his chubby face at evening and lisped: "Ade, teacher, you learned us good to-day", there welled up in Levi's heart a glorious thrill of satisfaction. The consciousness of daily duty well performed brought him a daily joy quite incommensurate with his paltry annual stipend.

Ezra Horst's three boys, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, named for the patriarchs, were undoubtedly the

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brightest pupils who attended the Greenbush school. Levi was glad when the time came for the Horsts to shoulder the responsibility of boarding the teacher for a month. It afforded him an opportunity of knowing the young hopefuls in their home life. He would eat, and sleep, and play with them, and be admitted into the intimacies of the family circle. Nor was he disappointed, for from the first day of his sojourn there, he felt the glow and warmth of a genuine Horst welcome.

It was then that Levi learned how great was the gulf fixed between Ezra and his father's second family. He had realized vaguely that there had been differences, since there was no visiting back and forth. Ezra and his affairs had never been discussed in the Ebytown home, but at Greenbush the chief topic of conversation seemed to be the worldly woman who had led old Noah off by the ear to the fleshpots of Ebytown. Into the very mouth of a yawning pit she had dragged not only Noah but her entire family, to their ruination, as time would tell.

The young teacher kept his own counsel and declined to express his opinions. His sympathies were all with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was bad enough to have no grandfather at all, as he very well knew, but to have one and not know him seemed infinitely worse.

Before he had spent a week with the Horsts, Levi had decided upon a reconciliation between the two families. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were to be, with

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him, joint promoters of the good cause. His plan was to take them with him, one by one, for three consecutive weeks, to spend Sunday in Ebytown. The time of year was propitious, June; the roads as passable as they would ever be. Fortunately, a new law had just come into effect requiring all schools to be closed on Saturdays. Could anything be more conducive to a successful issue of his hopes?

"Can they go, Ezra?" It was the third time Levi had asked the question.

Once more Ezra demurred, but finally gave a reluctant consent. Abraham might go the first week, he said, and if she didn't "do him nothing", he wouldn't "step on the others".

Levi chuckled to himself and wondered which of the two belligerent women held the success of his plans in the hollow of her hand.

Abraham had his little trip, and came back not only unscathed but delighted with his adventure. Then Isaac had his turn, his peep into the fairyland of Ebytown. The old bishop had won both their hearts. He had romped and played with them like a boy, had let them feed the chickens, and helped them hunt the eggs. There never was such an indulgent grandfather.

Levi smiled hopefully. He realized that Noah was lavishing upon the boys the affection he had never dared show for their father, Ezra; that he saw in them, or fancied he saw, some resemblance to his long-lost Rachael, sleeping through the years on the hill in the Greenbush farm.

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Throughout the busy week in the schoolroom Levi himself looked forward with all the eagerness of a child to these Sundays of rest and recreation. Sunday meant home—home and bean soup, such bean soup as only Sarah knew how to make. There was sure to be a college letter from Ephraim to supplement the chat with the old people, and Manassah was always full of ideas for civic enterprise and plans for the development of his own ever-expanding farms. As for Esther, he never dared confess it even to himself, but he loved the very swish of her skirts, though since her unfortunate episode with the faithless Gideon she seemed to look rather through than at him, as if by some strange process of reasoning, she held him, and him alone, accountable. Queer, unfathomable creatures, girls were, Levi concluded.

It happened that on the occasion of little Jacob's visit a somewhat disturbing element was introduced into the quiet of the holy day. While Manassah and Levi sat talking on the verandah, a stranger drove up with a spanking team of bay horses and a fine top buggy. He stopped at the Horst gate and shouted, "Hey, there, how far is it to Ebytown?"

"Ebytown? Why, this is the start of it," answered Manassah, waving his arm indifferently in the direction of the municipality, and fixing a pair of interested eyes on the man's handsome turnout.

Levi went and draped himself over the picket fence that he might see the curiosity at closer range.

The man was flattered into an attempt at further

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conversation. He had come through the Beverley Swamp, he said. He had got mired, and lost into the bargain. A confounded bog, it was, a disgrace to the country. He would see that something was done about it.

Manassah came now and hung himself over several other pickets of the white-washed fence, lest he should learn too late that he had missed something.

The tirade on the swamp continued. If he had known the terrible condition of the roads, wild horses could not have drawn him to Ebytown, the stranger declared. In all probability he had come on a wild goose chase anyway. Had either of them ever heard tell of a man named Peter Gingerich?

"Peter Gingerich!" exclaimed Levi.

"That's his name," replied the stranger. Not a prominent citizen, he expected, most likely a farm hand. He would welcome the slightest news about him.

Levi was trembling in every limb. A premonition of evil overcame him.

"Peter Gingerich he don't live no more." It was Manassah who volunteered the information.

"You mean he's dead?"

"Yes, he's dead."

"Dead! Well, I swan."

Levi wondered what that meant. Had there been some mistake? Could it be that his father had not died?

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The hope died away. The stranger accepted the information and inquired when the death occurred.

"When was it, Levi?" asked Manassah.

"In 1834," said Levi.

"Fever?"

"No, cholera," Levi told him. "Him and her went both together. They got buried in the same grave."

The man uttered his previous strange ejaculation, stroked his long beard thoughtfully and inquired, "Any children?"

"Yes," said Levi. "Me."

"Him," confirmed Manassah, indicating Levi.

"You?" The stranger stared hard at the young man, hanging there so ungainly, upon the picket fence. "Any brothers and sisters?"

"No," said Levi. "Nobody."

"What's your name?"

"Levi."

"Levi what?"

"Levi Gingerich."

"You didn't adopt him, then?" He asked this of Manassah.

"Ach, he's not what you would call adopted," said Manassah, "but he is to home with us. This long time already he lives here."

Apparently the stranger was not altogether displeased for he threw down the reins, jumped from the rig, and tied his horses to the post. On Manassah's invitation, he went and sat on the verandah. All the while he kept watching Levi with a critical eye,

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sizing him up obviously and trying to decide what further disclosures he ought to make.

"Mebbe you're in the same Freundschaft?" Manassah ventured to suggest when his curiosity had got the better of him.

The stranger indulged in another meditative pull at his beard. "I'm his uncle," he said, at length.

"His uncle, now?"

"I thought Peter would be somewhere," continued the man, "but it seems there is only him." He kept staring harder and harder at Levi.

"Only him," said Manassah. "It hurts him so that he is all alone in the world."

"It hurts me, too," said Uncle Joe. "That's why I've come."

Poor Levi sat speechless. All his life he had longed for someone who was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, and now that he had unexpectedly come upon that someone, he almost wished he hadn't. He was not at all sure that he liked his Uncle Joe. Certainly, he was not drawn to him instinctively. He did not even know what to say to him.

Uncle Joe, however, was quite capable of directing both the subject and the volume of the conversation. He made it painfully evident to Levi that all that he required of him was monosyllables, of Manassah nothing, nothing at all, except, perhaps, a polite retirement. Manassah could read the signs. It was not long before he found himself bowing himself off

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the verandah, Levi's pitiful glances of entreaty notwithstanding.

Uncle Joe then drew his chair closer to Levi's and launched into what was for him the most absorbing subject in the world, the accumulation of wealth. He himself favoured insurance as a means to that great end. Insurance was as yet in its infancy, to be sure, but its possibilities no man could estimate. He had been in the business only a short time, but in ten years he hoped to be worth fifty thousand dollars.

Levi gasped.

Yes, he was even now a wealthy man. This assertion was accompanied by a jingling of coins in his trousers' pocket. Levi understood, of course, that only men of money and position carried money around in that haphazard way.

For his life the boy could not have said a word.

Uncle Joe then went on to describe to this backwoods nephew of his the elegance of his office in Toronto. It was on the ground floor, and spacious, quite unlike the cramped, second-storey quarters of rival companies. After all, it paid, he considered, to look prosperous. His office equipment was the best to be had, a big desk of solid oak for his papers and books, a superfluous table in the corner, a swivel chair for himself, and several others of a more common variety for his clients.

"Clients?" said Levi. That was a word he had not yet incorporated into his vocabulary.

"The men that buy the insurance," explained Uncle

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Joe. "We take risks on houses and barns, live-stock and the like."

"And life insurance, too," Levi supposed.

"Life insurance is not worth that," was Uncle Joe's reply; and he snapped his fingers significantly in the young man's face.

"But . . ."

"A man will insure things he's spent his good money for," Uncle Joe went on. "He knows what he has to pay if they go up in smoke. But his life—how does he know how much that costs? That didn't come out of his purse, did it, now?"

Levi supposed not. He wished he had the courage to remind this moneyed uncle of his that all the gold in the world could not buy a single hour of life.

"I know what you're thinking," blustered the old man. "You say a man ought to protect his wife and children. But I'm in business to make money. What do I care for your widows and orphans?"

Levi heaved a deep sigh. Of what use was this new-found uncle of his if he had no place in his heart for a poor orphaned boy?

Uncle Joe talked on about himself and his prospects. Levi said nothing. He appeared so impressionable, so amenable to authority that Uncle Joe decided he was the very boy he wanted in his office in Toronto. Here was good fortune beyond his highest hopes. Then and there, he unfolded his plans. Levi was to go with him. They would start in the morning.

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"To-day at five o'clock I go to Greenbush," said Levi, calmly but firmly.

"Greenbush? Where's that? Any greenbushier than this is?"

"It's where I have my school," Levi told him. "Twelve miles north." He explained that he had borrowed Ezra's spring wagon, and that he must take it and little Jacob back home before dark.

"Jacob might drive himself home," Uncle Joe thought.

"He's only six."

"He won't do it any younger."

"He won't do it to-day," said Levi, flatly.

"You might drive him home and walk back," was Uncle Joe's next suggestion, "I'll wait till to-morrow night."

Levi shook his head.

"Till Tuesday morning, then," said Uncle Joe. "If you're not here by ten o'clock, or say noon, I'm off, and you can pull your own strings to get into a good insurance office."

"School is over the second week in July," said Levi, with dogged determination. "I can't let them without a teacher."

That was too much for Uncle Joe, who forthwith began to fume. Levi was nothing but an ungrateful Dutch dog, sitting on his haunches, without so much as a bark of appreciation for the munificent offer he had just made. Didn't he realize that there was only a matter of time between him and thousands of

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unearned dollars? Was he altogether blind to his own interests?

"You mean . . .?"

"I mean I'll make you my heir, dummhead."

Levi shook his head, as determined as ever.

The old man was exasperated. He was through with Levi and Ebytown forever. That very moment he was off to Toronto. Good-bye, and a safe journey to Greenbush. Suiting his actions to his words, he jumped into his carriage, waved his farewell to Man-assah, who was inspecting the handsome equipage, and told the horses to go on.

Queer emotions passed through the nephew's heart and mind as he watched his uncle disappear in the distance. Why had this experience come into his life? Why, indeed? Better have no kin at all, he decided, than this wraith of a relative who had dropped into his life, stayed for an hour, and left him alone again. And yet somehow his heart yearned for Uncle Joe. He was all he had in the world.

When Levi drove through Ebytown at precisely five o'clock with little Jacob in Ezra's spring wagon, there sat Uncle Joe on the hotel verandah, waiting, presumably, for another glimpse at his thankless dog of a nephew. He stayed in Ebytown all that day, and the next, making exhaustive inquiries about Levi and all that pertained to him, his friends, his school, his characteristics and ability, and the Horsts. And when Levi returned to Ebytown the second week in July there sat Uncle Joe, or his ghost, on the self-same

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chair at the hotel. He was sucking at a great Meer-schaum pipe. No suggestion of haste.

Levi went up to him and offered him his hand.

"Thought I'd wait for you after all," said Uncle Joe, returning the courtesy. "Wonderful pipe, this. Makes three weeks seem like so many days. When will you be ready to go?"

"To go where?"

"Well, I swan! Toronto, of course."

Levi smiled to see the degree of self-control the crusty, old gentleman had developed in three short weeks. "Uncle Joe," he said, "I'm sorry but I'm not going to Toronto. I'm going back to Greenbush next year. I've promised."

Uncle Joe grunted. "Promises are like pie crusts," he said, "lightly made and easily broken."

"Mine I do not break," said Levi.

The vials of Uncle Joe's wrath were stirred again. "You would throw away the chance of a lifetime to keep your word with these people in the backwoods?" he said.

"My word is all I have," Levi answered.

"Then make me a promise."

"What?"

"To come to me next July when school is over. A year from now."

This Levi would not guarantee to do, but he promised to weigh the matter well and to give him at least a definite answer by that time.

With this, Uncle Joe had to be content. Dis-

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appointed and not a little provoked, he shook the dust of Ebytown from his feet, and returned to his long-neglected swivel-chair in Toronto.

With new prospects in life, Levi's circle of friends expanded daily. He was something more now than Horsts' hired man; he outclassed any teacher in the backwoods schools. In the eyes of Ebytown, he was the heir-presumptive to a crotchety, but fabulously wealthy, old gentleman, the marks of whose affluence had been universally recognized. Hereafter Levi Gingerich was a man to be reckoned with.

Levi himself scarcely thought about his prospective wealth. He had little time to think about Uncle Joe's proposition while Manassah's crops were ripening in the fields. Once more he donned his working clothes. He was Horsts' hired man again for the summer.

When Sunday afternoon came, however, Levi appeared in quite a different rôle. He dressed himself in his Sunday suit, stuck a red geranium in his buttonhole, and sauntered off towards the town.

"Where are you going to, Levi?" Esther called after him.

"Where am I going to?" was the answer. "Ach, I guess I'll follow my nose and mebbe I'll come somewhere."

Esther bit her lip. It was a suspiciously evasive answer, to say the least. She put on her hat and walked down Frederick Street little more than a block behind the discourteous young man. Why couldn't he have

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waited and walked with her to Sunday-School? Usually he planned to do so.

If anyone had told her what her own eyes saw, Esther would never have believed it. Levi stopped suddenly, looked stealthily about him and then disappeared suddenly through an open gate. Never in all her life had Esther's heart thumped so wildly. It was Starlings'! Starlings'!

Starlings'! The name kept ringing in her ears throughout the Sunday-school session. Starlings'! Levi and Rhoda Starling! Was it all over, then, between Gideon and Rhoda? She stole a glance over to the corner where a certain very popular young man sat teaching a class of incorrigible boys. He showed no evidence of concern, and yet, with everything planned to the wedding-trip, his Rhoda was at that moment entertaining her Levi!

She knew now for the first time that she loved him, Levi, her playmate, her friend, her more than brother. It came upon her very suddenly, this realization of her love, and yet, somehow, it brought with it the consciousness that it had been always there. This was no mere infatuation based upon a mistaken ideal, but a genuine, healthy affection, the culmination of many years of happy companionship. The tragedy was that she had not known the secret of her heart until it was too late; the tragedy of tragedies that Levi's love for her had grown cold so soon. Was ever fate so cruel?

Levi went to Starlings' not only on Sundays but repeatedly throughout the week. Heart-sick, Esther

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counted the hours until he returned. Night after night she lay awake until she heard the latch click. A dull, metallic sound it was, chilling every vestige of hope in the poor girl's aching heart. The clock had struck two. Often the dawn brought her sleep. She longed for the middle of August, when distance and the duties of the school-room might conspire with her to wean Levi from the calculating Rhoda.

When the last Sunday of his summer vacation came around, Levi invited himself to the "doddy-house" for dinner. No one knew what it meant, but Esther's heart beat very fast. She decked herself in her prettiest dress and plucked her showiest flowers to decorate the house. Levi saw, perhaps, but noticed not. There he sat in everybody's way, his big feet sprawled out in front of him and his eyes staring abstractedly into space. He might have stayed at Manassah's for all the pleasure he gave, or received.

"Thinking about her?" asked Esther, stumbling over his protruding feet on her way to the spring-house for the butter and cream.

Levi drew up his legs and looked at her. "If I'm thinking about who?" he asked.

Esther deigned no reply.

Levi immediately stood up, shook down his trousers and followed her out of doors.

"You stop here," Sarah called after him. "If there's two to fetch it goes twict as long."

Levi did not stop until he found himself face to face with Esther in the spring-house. Indeed, it would

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have been well if he had stopped even there, but he caught the astonished girl in his arms and kissed her repeatedly. "It's you I'm thinking about," he told her. "You—always you."

Esther drew herself up coldly. "Leave me be," she commanded. "I hate you." Her heart was as cold as the water of the spring.

"Hate is only the other side of love," said Levi. He stood before her panting and penitent. He hated himself. No man ever did such a hateful thing as to marry one girl when he loved another. That was to violate the sanctity of human love; that was the heinous sin he was about to commit.

"Rhoda Starling," said Esther, helping him with his confession and then dragging it out, as it were, with ill-concealed malice for his inspection.

"Rhoda?" said Levi. "No, Veronica."

"Veronica!" The butter plate fell to the floor with a crash, but Esther neither saw nor heard. "Veronica!" she repeated, half dazed, it seemed. "Oh, Levi, you must not marry her."

In a trice there had flashed on the wall of Esther's memory the picture of Veronica Starling as she had seen her once in the long ago. Wild eyes, dishevelled hair, torn night dress, she saw them all again. An icy chill seized her heart. "Levi! Levi!" she cried, "you must not do it."

"I have promised."

"Tell her you do not love her. You don't, Levi."

"She holds me to my promise."

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Esther was fairly distraught. "Then you must break your promise," she said.

"That I cannot, will not do," said Levi.

"But Veronica . . . she has no right to marry," persisted Esther.

Levi looked into her great, blue, innocent eyes. "Tell me what you know," he said.

Esther paused.

"Tell me, Esther."

"I want to, Levi, but . . . She's not good enough for you. She's not, Levi. She's not advanced in her mind like you are, and she's all for self. She wants your money."

Levi knew it, he said. "Too bad I have none to give her," he added, drily. "I think myself she'd sooner have Uncle Joe. You're not hiding anything from me, Esther?"

The girl sighed. She would have given all she possessed for the power to forget for one fleeting moment that solemn vow of childhood by which Rhoda had bound her to secrecy for life. "I can't tell you all," she said. "I crossed my heart and hoped to die."

"Then you must not tell," said Levi. "But Esther, why do you not love me?"

For answer Esther threw herself into Levi's arms and burst into tears. "I do," she sobbed. "I never loved anybody but you."

Levi comforted her as best he could. "I thought all the time it was Gideon," he said.

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"Gideon? You know what you said about him. He's all you said, and a coward yet. It's you I love. Ach, Levi, I wish I could die."

"Forgive me, Esther," said Levi, "and try to forget. I am not worthy of your love."

Sarah's shrill voice was heard calling from the kitchen.

Esther staggered towards the door, stumbled, and all but fell. It was "such a mean little step", she said, excusing her awkwardness.

"Where's the butter?" demanded Sarah. "Is it all to grease already?"

"The butter?" stammered the guilty girl. "The butter I forgot."

"Did you fetch the cream even?"

"Ach, no. That I forgot, too."

Sarah sniffed audibly. "Where's Levi?" she said. "Him you don't so easy forget, I think."

"I'm here," cried the culprit, emerging from the spring-house with his hands full. "Here's the butter. The dish I broke."

"Ei! Ei!" exclaimed Sarah. "That plate I had yet from the sale already." She looked hard at Levi and added, succinctly, "Dishes I can buy more of, but a hired girl I won't have. So now you know, Levi Gingerich."

The disgraced young man decided not to stay for dinner after all. He went over to Manassah's to see "if they were et yet".

"You can go back now and fetch the cream," Sarah

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told the shamed Esther. "What you don't have in your head you must take out of your feet."

On Wednesday of that week there was a double wedding at the Starlings', Rhoda's having been postponed and Veronica's advanced until they synchronized. It was a small affair, comprising the Methodist minister and his wife, the radiant brides and their parents, Old One Per Cent and his son, and a very forlorn young man who had no family connections at all. Out of courtesy to Levi, an invitation had been despatched to the fabulous Uncle Joe, but whether he received it or not nobody knew. At the conclusion of the ceremony the newlyweds set out for Shade's Mills in a two-seated rig, decorated with old boots and tin cans, the grooms in front and the coy brides behind. When they returned the next day, there was a grand "shivaree", the brides' slippers being held at five dollars a pair. By Saturday Ebytown had settled down to the usual routine, with Gideon behind the counter complimenting the weather. Levi got his clothes at the Horsts' and said his farewells. On Sunday afternoon at the latest he must start for Greenbush.

From the very first Veronica was discontented in her married life. With Levi away all week, she was nothing more nor less than a grass widow. She wouldn't see him for months in the wintertime. It was preposterous.

"Come with me," suggested Levi. "All week long they say I shall fetch you along up to Greenbush once."

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Veronica said not a word, but she tossed her haughty head, and thereby spoke volumes.

Levi sighed. He saw whitecaps on his matrimonial sea, choppy little whitecaps, but ominous.

"It will be different next year when you go to Toronto," put in his mother-in-law, adding a note of optimism to the prevailing gloom.

"When I go to Toronto. . . ?"

"Yes, next July," said Mrs. Starling, ignoring entirely the note of interrogation. "Veronica is great for society. She gets so bored in Ebytown."

"But if I don't go to Toronto?"

"If you don't go?" cried Veronica, throwing such daggers in her glance as are usually accorded only to men of a much longer matrimonial experience.

"If you don't go, we'll make you," said Mrs. Starling, with cool determination. "What do you think we married you for, anyway?"

So week after week, they wrangled on. There was always some bone of contention in the Starling cupboard, some occasion to toss it into the ring. Levi was sincerely thankful when the snow came, giving him a plausible excuse for spending his Sundays in Greenbush. He shared Solomon's preference for a dinner of herbs where love is to a stalled ox and hatred therewith. The charm which had once hung over Ebytown had departed.

When spring came the vexed question of a possible removal to Toronto was rehearsed, but Levi had definitely and finally made up his mind not to accept

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his uncle's offer. He would relinquish his much-loved work at Greenbush, if he must, and he began to look for a school in, or nearer, Ebytown. None offered, however. He was ashamed to ask Manassah Horst for work, and he rebelled at Bomberger's store. His wife's demands became more and more insistent, and the unhappy Levi was at his wits' end.

Veronica, be it known, had social ambitions which precluded Levi's participation in any form of manual labour. Since he refused to go to Toronto, she insisted that he set up an office in Ebytown with an oak desk and a swivel chair. He owed it to her, she claimed, to fill a reputable position in society.

In desperation, Levi rented a bit of an office over a store on the main street, and timorously hung out his shingle. A conveyancer, he called himself, and an issuer of marriage licenses. Poor as poverty itself, he announced that he had money to loan.

It was a big venture, but it succeeded. Whatever work came to his hand Levi did to the best of his ability. He was thorough, honest, courteous, genial, kind. An oak desk soon became part of the office equipment, and in time were added not only a swivel chair for the proprietor but several equally comfortable ones for his clients. Levi became prosperous, at least sufficiently so to mollify the exacting Veronica. He built a new house for her and furnished it as comfortably as he could. But with his financial success he lost that glorious thrill of satisfaction he had so constantly experienced in the Greenbush school-room.

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He felt that somehow he had got out of his niche. He had lost the joy of living.

And then, to Levi's unspeakable delight, there came into their modest home a gift from heaven itself, a tiny, baby girl. Only a little bundle of helplessness, she was, but her advent inspired the father with a new zest in life. He had something to live for now, something that evoked all his sleeping manliness, all his long-thwarted love. Little Mary! In the years to come, God grant it, she would climb upon his knee, pull his whiskers, and smother him with kisses. He would hear her lisp her evening prayer, "God bless daddy, and God bless mamma, and God bless me. Amen." Ah, then he would know again a hundred-fold the joy of living.

But Little Mary was still an infant in arms when Levi's happy dream faded away in the darkness of a single midnight hour. That was the night when Veronica rushed into the street in her nightclothes and rent the air with shrieks and moans. The neighbours were awake and gaping before Levi succeeded in inducing her to return to the house.

The next morning the tongues were wagging. It was incipient insanity, some said. Not so incipient, said others. To their knowledge, Veronica had shown signs of mental disorders when a girl in her teens. But this the Starlings emphatically denied. It was all Levi's fault, they claimed. He had never cared for his wife; he wanted to be rid of her. To the world he was genial enough, yes, but at home, a very devil. If they

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had known, they would never have allowed Veronica to throw herself away on him.

So Levi found himself unexpectedly on the great uncharted sea of matrimony, pulling on the oars of a frail, unseaworthy craft, with winds of accusation and suspicion blowing this way and that, and with an unbalanced woman, his unloved wife, at the helm. The night was dark and lowering, and as yet there was no sign of morning.

A month went by with the usual conjugal bickering, but with no further lapse, apparently, on the young wife's part, and then one evening Levi returned to his home at the supper hour to find the house a perfect bedlam. Veronica was raving mad, threatening suicide. Full of apprehension, Levi rushed upstairs to little Mary's cradle. The child was not there. Yes, she was, too, but under the bedclothes, struggling, suffocating. Levi tore his hair. For a minute it seemed that he, too, was going insane. Then he seized the baby, bedclothes, cradle and all, and ran with his precious bundle down the stairs and out into the night.

He did not stop until he reached the front door of the Horst homestead. Was he, too, mad, he wondered? He pushed through the half-open door. Insane, irrevocably insane, he probably was, but in he went.

"Levi Gingerich!" cried Sarah, peering at the intruder over her spectacles. "Look, Nooi, if it ain't Levi come to visit us."

Levi pushed past the old people and their welcome. It was Esther he sought, and, having found her, the

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helpless man laid his bundle of infantile helplessness at her feet.

"The baby!" cried the astonished girl.

"Don't leave her die," begged Levi. "She's all I've got, all I've got in the world. Little Mary!" There were fathoms of pathos in every heart-wrung word.

The child looked up into Esther's face and cried the low, disconsolate, helpless wail of babyhood.

In a moment Esther was clasping little Mary to her breast, kissing away the tears and trying to smile through her own liquid eyes. A very Madonna, she looked, a Madonna in tears.

"You will keep her?" said Levi, hopefully.

"Till you take her away," promised Esther.

"Oh! Esther!" That was all, but as he turned and looked at her over his shoulder the same memories flashed through the minds of both. "It's what most women are," Esther had said in the long ago, "but I can't be it. Mam said." Ah! She had then, and now, the heart of a mother.

The next day Levi took Veronica to Toronto, and returned alone. The shades were never raised after that in the little house on the hill, the garden ran wild with weeds. Levi went to live at the hotel and ate his meals with strangers. A lonely life! But on Sunday afternoons he always sauntered off down Frederick Street to visit all that was near and dear to him in his old adopted home, happily his little Mary's now.

Two years longer Veronica lived in obscurity, and then one day they brought her last remains to Eby-

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town for burial. The Starlings made all the funeral arrangements, ignoring the husband entirely until they realized that he was the logical person to pay the accounts. Thereafter, they intimated, it was their wish that their paths should lie in different directions. Levi acquiesced in silence, but without regret.

Before the snow fell on Veronica's new-made grave the great desire of her heart was fulfilled—too late. Uncle Joe died, suddenly, the letter stated, and Levi fell sole heir to a tidy fortune. "To my nephew, Levi Gingerich," the will read, "I bequeath all my estate to have and to use as he may decide; and this I do with confident trust that he has a will that cannot be lightly bent and a word that will not be easily broken."

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CHAPTER XII

More Dishonour

DURING the summer of 1861 the Horsts were called upon to pass through a bitter experience, the dire results of which followed the family for many an unhappy day. For the first time in their history, a cloud enveloped them. Their good name was dragged ruthlessly in the mire of ignominy and shame.

It was Cyrus, of course, who was the offender, and the shadow did not fall altogether unexpectedly. He had always been as wayward as he was self-willed. For years he had been the chief subject of his father's earnest intercessions, and Manassah had long watched with growing concern the downward proclivities of his young brother. It was Sarah, the too-fond mother, who spoiled him. She resented any criticism of the boy's conduct, and nothing could disturb the confidence she reposed in him. But this blind, implicit trust of hers, as it happened, only greased for him the rungs of the ladder which brought him in easy stages to the very bottom of a horrible pit.

There was no gainsaying the fact that the boy was clever. He had fifteen books to his credit in Eby's red school-house, and in his grammar school days Latin and its declensions had had no terror for him.

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Mr. Collins had pointed out to him, as he had to Ephraim and Levi and to many another brainy lad whom he had chanced to meet, the routes which would lead to ultimate success somewhere beyond the confines of human horizons. Cyrus had a mind that outclassed them all. He could be, he declared, anything, everything, he chose to be.

Cyrus was determined to be something big and remarkable, but he couldn't decide just what. It was a foregone conclusion that he would create a stir in the world, but the method he was going to employ was still a matter for conjecture. His childish ambition to be an auctioneer, with a horn and a white nag, had vanished like an unworthy dream; he inclined now to the professions. He started out to be a man of wealth, influence, and reputation, in the guise of a doctor, but he soon changed his mind when he meditated upon the long, weary, sleepless nights the pursuit of that honourable profession would entail. Why should he jump and run at everybody's beck and call, he, Cyrus Horst, who was so much better qualified to give orders for others to obey? A lawyer, then? Some day he might sit like a lord upon a bench and dispense justice with a high hand, but between him and that seat of authority lay long years of distasteful experience in trying to right the wrongs of humanity. Teaching? With Saturdays struck off the school calendar, and with numerous vacations interspersed throughout the year, it had its attractions, but he had no patience with children, and he didn't propose to spend even five days of

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the week on such a thankless job as pulling stupid blockheads out of the slough of ignorance. So this young man of brilliant intellect wasted his time in fruitless excursions into the professional world and in even more fruitless self-exaltation. Search as he would, he could not find a walk in life that seemed worthy of his exceptional attainments, or that offered the honour and emolument necessary to his happiness.

Then suddenly a bright idea occurred to Cyrus. The very thing! He saw himself seated in the swivel chair in Levi's new office. As a partner of the firm, he would share in the honour and respect that Levi had won from the community, and he would bask in the sunshine of his great popularity. There was a remote possibility, too, that he might share in the twenty thousand dollars that Levi was said to have inherited from his somewhat legendary Uncle Joe.

It happened that Levi was at the time looking about for some bright boy to help him in the ever-increasing work of the office. He had advertised among his friends that he wanted a young man of good penmanship to execute deeds, some one who would be at the same time thorough and reliable. If he could find the right party, he would pay him well.

Cyrus swung into the office one day and announced to Levi that he was the man he sought.

"You!"

"Yes, me!" said Cyrus. "Ain't I good with the pen?"

He was, too, there was no denying it. He wrote

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a beautiful hand, firm and uniform. Levi had often admired it. But somehow he hesitated.

"Pen work comes easy to me," continued Cyrus, stating in other words his sole qualification. "Writing good is as easy as rolling off a log."

Levi was stroking his side whiskers, thinking hard and fast. "Yes, you can write good," he said, "that I know." All the while he kept looking not at the applicant but through the window down into the street below.

"And spell. . ."

"That you can do, too," said Levi. He did not need to be reminded of the phenomenal prowess Cyrus had displayed in the greatest spelling-match of all history.

Cyrus had been watching anxiously every feature of Levi's face, but he read no hope there. He walked over to the window presently, thereby compelling Levi to look at him. "The tables are turned, it seems," he said.

"What tables?"

"Them that the Horsts set for you," was the significant reply.

"You mean. . ."

"That's what I mean," said Cyrus.

Levi pulled his beard thoughtfully. "I'll try you for three months," he said, at length. "If you work good, you can stop."

"I'll work good," promised Cyrus.

In spite of Levi's misgivings, the boy served his

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apprenticeship faithfully and well. The deeds he executed were faultless in diction and remarkable for their artistic qualities. The clients were loud in their praises. Levi began to think hopefully of his assistant. He was actually going to make good.

When the three months of trial had passed and Cyrus was on the eve of his permanent appointment, Levi took occasion to express his gratification in a tangible way. He was going to increase his salary, he said, by twenty-five cents a week.

"I'm going to stop," said Cyrus, forgetting his thanks.

Levi was mystified. "You mean you're going to stop here?" he said. "Of course you can."

"How you talk for a teacher yet!" said Cyrus. "I say I'm not going to stay. I'm stopping work. Tomorrow I'm going to Toronto."

"To Toronto!" cried Levi, overcome with surprise and disappointment. "What to do?"

"To have a good time," replied the boy.

"What for a good time do you mean?"

"I'm off on a spree."

Levi could scarcely believe his ears. "You're not going to get drunk, Lucy?" he said.

"That's what."

"You must not," entreated Levi. "It will ruin you, liquor will. Leave it alone, Lucy."

"Bosh!" exploded the indomitable youth. "Do you think I'm a bubby yet? To-day I'm a man, twenty-one. I can manage my own affairs, I guess."

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He picked up his cap and threw it into the air to express the delightfully hilarious feeling that accompanied his coming of age.

Levi was nonplussed. He paced the room for some time, and then turned to Cyrus and said, "I'll take you to Toronto, Lucy. We'll shut up shop and go on the morning train. I'll take you all around the University and the Normal school and the big stores. It won't cost you a cent."

Cyrus gave vent to a derisive explosion of laughter. "I'm going to have a good time," he said.

"Well . . . ?"

"I'm done with apron strings."

Levi knew what he meant. He said no more, but he thought a great deal. He made up his mind that at six o'clock he would walk home to the Horsts' with Cyrus and he would add his further dissuasions to those of his family.

But by six o'clock Cyrus was on the train that was steaming its way into the city. In the middle of the afternoon he had slipped out of the office on an innocent pretext, and he did not return. Levi's suspicions had been aroused, and an investigation had been instituted. From the station-master the information leaked out that Cyrus Horst had bought a ticket for Toronto and boarded the afternoon train. Daniel Ernst had gone with him. To judge by their baggage, the pair were off on some joyous, extended visit.

Levi's heart was full of misgiving. Moreover, he had the unpleasant sensation of having a disagree-

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able duty to perform. But not for a moment did he falter. He hurried out Frederick Street to the Horsts', and without so much as stopping to look into little Mary's cradle, he found Sarah. "He's . . . He's not coming home," he said. "Cyrus ain't."

Sarah stared at him. "For supper ain't he coming home?" she said. There was disappointment in every word. "Not for his birthday supper?"

The table stood before them fairly groaning with all the delectable dishes that appealed most to the voracious appetite of the idolized boy, head-cheese and sauerkraut, and liverwurst, schmierkase and apple-butter, schnitz pie and fat cakes. They were all there in duplicate, that is to say one dish of each on each half of the table. But there was nobody to eat the feast—at least nobody that mattered.

"No," said Levi, "he's not coming for supper home."

"You ain't making him work?" Sarah looked narrowly at her boy's employer over the rims of her spectacles. "You should shame yourself the way you work him so hard."

"He's not working," replied Levi.

"Not working? What's he doing, then?"

"He's went . . . he's went to Toronto."

"To Toronto!"

"To Toronto!" echoed Noah, sitting on the edge of his chair, rigid with alarm. "Alone did he go?"

Levi shook his head. "Daniel Ernst went with him," he said.

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"Him?" cried Sarah. "Daniel's a bad boy. He always pulls Cyrus into mischief."

"And Lucy don't pull him out, that much I know," interjected Esther.

"The devil is in them both," said Noah.

At this, Sarah flew into a rage. "You're too free with the devil," she told Noah. "Why must you see him everywhere you look?"

The charge was not without foundation. Noah always saw the arch enemy of mankind, as Peter saw him, in the guise of a lion walking about seeking whom he might devour. He loomed up before him now like a hideous monster gloating over the boy Cyrus.

It was all Levi's fault, Sarah declared, that Cyrus had wandered from the path of rectitude. For ten hours every day they two had worked in the same office. Why hadn't he watched him? She had expected that much at least in return for all that the Horsts had done for him, were doing for him even yet. She turned and glowered at the child in the cradle.

Little Mary looked up, and sensing the chill of a cold, uncompromising world, she raised her feeble voice and uttered a low, disconsolate, helpless wail.

"She's always howling," snapped Sarah. "If she was mine, I'd give her something to howl at."

Meanwhile the birthday supper stood untouched and forgotten on the table. Only an orchestra of flies buzzed over the feast, nibbling here and there betimes while awaiting their cues. But the people for whom

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the delicacies had been prepared gazed either forlornly at each other or vacantly at nothing. They seemed to have forgotten that they ever had an appetite.

Presently a step was heard on the stoop, and into the house of gloom bustled Aunt Leah, alarmed and indignant. "Where's Cyrus?" she demanded, with a directness born of nervous excitement.

Nobody cared to answer. A presentiment of evil pervaded the room.

"Where's Cyrus? Ain't he here?"

Sarah screwed up her courage. "He's went to Toronto, 'tseems," she said, trying to appear unconcerned and even cheerful about it. "Can't he go to Toronto if he wants to?"

Levi had not taken his eyes off Aunt Leah's disturbed countenance. A strange premonition overcame him. "What's wrong?" he said, apprehensively. "Did Cyrus do you something?"

"Did he do me something?" shrieked Aunt Leah, recognizing Levi now for the first time and turning upon him with the ferocity of an animated tigress. "What did you and him do with my money? Eh? I want it back."

"Your money? What money?"

"My five hundred dollars."

Levi sank into a chair and buried his face in his hands. Five hundred dollars!

"Something's wrong," said Esther, "and whatever it is, Lucy's at the back of it. You don't need to blame it all on Levi."

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Aunt Leah had the floor. With loud protestations and with wild gesticulation she told her story. It was her own money, her very own, saved from the eggs and the butter before they left the farm. She had intended to put it in the bank some day, but she was always afraid that it might fail. Levi must give her the money back. She didn't feel good about it. From the first it didn't "set good" on her conscience.

"Why did you go and give it to him, then?" asked Levi.

"He said you wanted it," said Aunt Leah. "Right away you must have it, he said, and fifteen per cent. was good for interest."

"Fifteen per cent!" cried Levi.

"I thought it was too high. That's what got so after my conscience. But I wanted the money," wailed the defrauded woman.

"And did he give you anything to show for it?"

"This," said Aunt Leah. She drew a piece of crumpled paper from the pocket of her petticoat, and spread it out on a corner of the table. "It's such a little note, or what you call it. I ain't going to lose my money, am I?"

"It serves you right if you do," declared Sarah. "Didn't you know yet how smart Cyrus is? You always was foolish with your money. Why didn't you stick it in the bank?"

Levi was examining the piece of crumpled paper. It was all as Aunt Leah had said, five hundred dollars for three months, at usury rates. At the bottom he

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read his own name. He could not have told it from his own signature. It was a perfect forgery. He stood and stared blankly at it.

"I ain't going to lose it, am I?" queried Aunt Leah, nervously.

Levi returned the paper to her. "It's all right," he said. "I'll pay it when it falls due."

"And the interest, too?"

"Yes, that I'll pay, too," he said. "Don't worry."

"Then you keep the note," said Aunt Leah, thrusting the paper into Levi's hand, "so you'll know when it's time to pay."

"But it's all you have to show," said Levi, offering to return it.

Aunt Leah pushed it aside. "I don't need nothing to show," she said, "not if you say you will pay. What do us women know about such things, anyway? We'd better let it to the men."

"If we let it to the right men," corrected Esther. "There's men and men."

Acting on a sudden impulse Esther now left the cradle she had been rocking and walked over to the great walnut desk that Noah had bought at the sale. This she opened, disclosing to view the four hidden compartments whose identity Leah had revealed to the community. One by one she drew out the drawers and turned them upside down. There was nothing inside to fall out, no, not so much as a single penny. But there ought to have been something in each individual drawer.

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"How much did you have there?" Levi asked Noah.

"Near a hundred dollars," replied the old man, older now by ten years, it seemed, in his hour of grief. "How much did you have in yours, Sarai?"

The woman flung back her head and said: "There was nothing in mine."

"Why, you always have plenty there."

"I told Cyrus he could have what he wanted all," explained the indulgent mother. "Mine, anyways, he did not steal."

"I had twenty-five dollars in mine," said Esther. "That he stole. I got it off you, Levi, to buy things for little Mary."

Manassah sauntered in at this juncture and heard the startling story. Upon investigation, he found that Cyrus had not overlooked him. His strong box had been opened and emptied of its contents, some fifty dollars, more or less. Even his trousers pockets had been ransacked, and purse and all had been taken. There wasn't a cent left on the premises, not even the coppers that belonged to the children.

"About seven hundred dollars," computed Levi. "I guess we don't need to look for him back to-morrow."

"We don't need to look for him never," said Noah. "Him and his money are off with the devil."

Sarah cast at her husband a penetrating look of accusation. "And you a bishop yet," she said. "Where is your faith that you preach about? If you would

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only have left Cyrus to the Lord, and forgot . . . the evil one."

"If you would leave the Lord alone, and keep your eye on the devil," retorted Noah. "It's him that needs the watching, him, the devil. I ain't afraid to say his name."

"Nooi Horst!" cried the exasperated wife. "You're worse than an infidel."

Levi took the morning train to Toronto. He had slipped down to the office at an early hour and pinned a little notice on the door, apprising his clients that an urgent matter of a private nature had called him unexpectedly out of town. Would they please postpone their business until the end of the week, or until such time as he should return?

It wasn't long before the news was being circulated on every street corner. Cyrus Horst and Daniel Ernst had absconded. Some said it was two thousand dollars they took with them, others, three. Ei! Ei! It was Levi's money, it seemed, and he was hot-foot after them.

"He won't ketch them," said Old One Per Cent to a group of hangers-on at the store. "At least I hope he won't. It serves him right."

"It serves who right?"

"Why, Levi. He had too much money and he got it too easy."

"Easy come, easy go," drawled out one of the chair-warmers. To emphasize this bit of epigram-

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matical wisdom, he spat a wad of chewing tobacco into the stove and wiped his mouth on his coat-sleeve.

"He's a lucky dog, that Levi," continued Old One Per Cent. "Look how easy he tied himself loose from them Starlings."

The drawler drew his plug from his pocket and pried off another generous mouthful of the weed. He balanced his weight on the two hind legs of his chair, chewed and meditated, "When the Lord wants a fool, he takes a man's wife," he said, at length, emptying at the same time both his mouth and his mind. "Levi will stand watching."

"He'll take Esther Horst," opined the proprietor. "He ain't no fool. Lucy can be a bad egg, but there's a lot of good in the nest he came from."

"Lots of money, too," interjected some one. "Why didn't Gideon take Horsts' girl? You didn't get much with the Starlings, I guess."

"Nothing but big ideas about spending my money," was Old One Per Cent's caustic reply. "That's all she's got rattling 'round in her empty head. Look here, why can't we talk about something pleasant?"

On Friday Levi returned to Ebytown, alone. Three long days he had searched for the culprits, and then by the merest chance he learned that two young men answering the description he gave had bought tickets immediately upon their arrival in Toronto and had forthwith boarded the train for New York.

"NooYork!" wailed Sarah, when she heard it.

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“Noo York yet, and all that wickedness! Ach, Cyrus, my bubby-boy!”

The days that followed were eternities of anxious waiting for the distressed mother. By day or by night, Cyrus was her one concern. He was the centre around which revolved her thoughts, her conversation, her prayers. He would come again, she was sure. The good Lord would bring him to her. Three times a day she set a place for him at table, and every night the brightest coal-oil lamp burned in the window to give him a cheery welcome. But day followed restless night and night succeeded weary day through the weeks and months, and still the wanderer did not return.

To ease her anxiety, Levi went to New York. He promised that he would spend a week at least in diligent search. Sarah found herself buoyed up with a new hope. Day after day she sat expectant, but no letter came, no message of any kind. When Levi returned at the end of two weeks he was alone. He had followed up countless possibilities, but his search had been utterly fruitless. Not a trace could he find; not a clue had been substantiated. Alas, every new hope at which Sarah clutched proved only another bubble, bursting suddenly and leaving the unhappy woman more deeply mired in the slough of an ineffable despair.

Unfortunately for Levi, his self-sacrificing efforts to locate Cyrus evoked in the mother's heart anything but gratitude. When Sarah thought of Levi it was only to connect him with a succession of shattered

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hopes. It was Cyrus she wanted, her own prodigal, profligate son, not this smug interloper, this nobody's boy, who kept thrusting himself so persistently, so uselessly into her life. Day by day the dislike grew. It was with difficulty that she restrained herself from telling him to betake himself and his little Mary to some place where they would be more welcome, and never darken the Horst door again. But Levi did not understand the woman's mind, and he wondered why it was that the more earnestly he sought to ingratiate himself with her, the more obvious and uncompromising became her hatred.

The climax was reached when one day, peeping through the window, she spied the odious Levi engaged in pleasant conversation with Esther on the stoop. Little Mary toddled from one to the other, calling alternately "Dada" and "Estie" to heedless ears. There stood the enraptured pair, as if on some exalted, heavenly plane, gazing obliviously at each other with soft, expressive eyes which spoke the silent, universal language of love.

Sarah's heart grew hard as flint. What did Levi care for Cyrus? It was Esther he wanted, had always wanted. Let him want! Who was he that he should come into her family to disregard the life-long claims of motherhood, and to run away with the stay of her declining years? Who, indeed? What right had he to defy the obvious will of Almighty God? He was nothing but a designing, presumptuous, self-seeking hypocrite. In love? Yes, with himself.

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Sarah walked straight into the presence of the lovers and told them all this and more. She soon brought them back from their Elysium to mundane realities. She wouldn't have it. They might as well know it first as last. Esther was hers, and she did not intend to give her up.

"She can stop to home," ventured the discomfited Levi, willing to compromise. "We can live here."

"To home she will stop," affirmed Sarah, with unwavering decision. "Back in Greenbush I told her that long already. And you I told, too, Levi, more than once. Esther I must have, but you I don't need. You can go."

The young man stood aghast. He looked long and steadfastly at Esther, put on his hat finally with some determination and went to pick up little Mary.

The child was filled with a nameless fear, and clung to Esther's skirts for protection. Esther lifted her compassionately to the safety of her arms. Then she looked straight into her mother's face, and answering decision with defiance, she said, "Here she stops with me. If she goes, then I go, too."

Levi encircled them both with his manly arms.

"I need her, Levi," said Esther, beseechingly. "Don't take her away. Promise me. I am all wrapped up in her, it seems."

So Levi's little Mary stayed on at the Horsts' to be the light and sunshine of the sad and gloomy house. The father came to see her once a week, on sufferance, and usually on Sunday afternoon. If he spoke

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to Esther, it was only in the presence of others. Noah and Sarah sat in their respective chairs, silent and meditative. In all the house little Mary alone was happy in her innocent childhood.

Not for a single moment of the day could any of the adults forget the shameless boy whose sin hung like a pall over the household. Throughout the long, cheerless days of an endless winter all their thoughts were centred on him. Would he ever come again?

May came, and with it the colourful buds of spring. Once more a roseate hope warmed the hearts of the unhappy family. With more enthusiasm Sarah lit the lamp at evenfall and placed it in the window. She brought forth her best china dishes and set them in the empty place at table. The spring would bring back to her wandering boy tender memories of home, she reasoned. He would surely come now.

He came, yes, but, alas, not as she expected. Towards the end of the month Manassah received a telegram. He had never received one before, and he tore the envelope open, nervously. It was from New York!—from Daniel Ernst! The nameless, haunting terror that for more than a twelve-month had challenged every secret hope was at last the victor. Cyrus was dead! Dead! A shiver ran around the room.

Manassah read the message again. It was only a few words, but it told graphically enough the pathetic story of a shipwrecked life. Dishonoured and penniless, the Bishop's unworthy son lay dead in a foreign land. A pauper's grave, if Manassah would not

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come. A life of unlimited possibilities had run aground at twenty-two. Cyrus might have been anything, but he was nothing, worse than nothing. He was gone, hopelessly, irreparably and forever gone.

Dead! And yet the distressing message brought an indefinable relief. The uncertainty, at least, was over. They knew now how great was the load of sorrow and disgrace they must bear through life for Cyrus's sake. All hope was gone, but with it had fled, mercifully, a horde of anxious fears. The worst was in the past.

Manassah took the next train for New York, and brought back the long-lost, truant pair, Cyrus cold in death and Daniel pale as death itself.

Young Ernst had lost his wonted swagger. His eyes were pools of penitence, his heart was full of contrition. He and Cyrus had led a wild life, drinking, gambling, worse than that. He couldn't bear to talk about it. He would give everything if he could only forget. That last night was awful. They were on their way to their attic home after a night of carousal when the train . . . Yes, they were both drunk. By the skin of his teeth he had escaped, but Lucy . . . Lucy wasn't so lucky. The train struck him. Twenty feet he was hurled through the air. When he found him, he was dying.

"Did he say anything?" asked Sarah.

"He tried to talk," Daniel told her. "I don't know right what he said all, but at the last he yelled out 'Home! Take me home!'"

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Sarah reclined prostrate with grief in her rocking chair. "Home!" she murmured. "Take me home!"

Never had there been so tragic a death in all the history of Ebytown, and if public curiosity was to be satisfied, the funeral would be one of enormous proportions. No sooner had the corpse been brought home than the women of the neighbourhood began to invade the house to prepare for the solemn ceremony. They baked bread, and cookies and pies, until Sarah's larder, and Hannah's, too, were filled to overflowing, and yet when the crowds began to gather at the appointed hour, grave fears were entertained that there might not be enough.

The family were all present, except Ephraim, who was at the time far away in Europe. There they sat huddled together, weeping softly, united in their common sorrow. Ezra and Mary had come from Greenbush and sat with their boys in awed silence. Friends and neighbours stood about, tearfully sympathetic, and voicing their reflections on this dispensation of Providence sent, no doubt, as a warning to them all.

Outside, the crowd was larger and the feeling not so intense. The men stood on the stoop, or hung over the fence discussing such extraneous topics as the weather and the crops. The teacher of the old red school-house and Mr. Collins of the grammar school confided to each other their mutual pedagogical disappointment. Business was alarmingly dull, according to Old One Per Cent, but Schwartzentruber, the bookbinder, declared that he found it brisk enough.

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Nothing but a Horst funeral could have induced him to shut up shop.

Presently a hush fell over the assembled crowd. They were singing. The service had begun. Those who could crowded indoors. There was prayer and preaching, interspersed with sobs. The very atmosphere seemed surcharged with sorrow.

The time had come to view the remains. The coppers were lifted from the sightless eyes, and the friends began to pass in single file in front of the coffin.

"Natural, ain't he?" whispered one.

"Awful cut up with the train," returned the other. "That learned him a good lesson, I think. If that didn't learn him, nothing will."

"It didn't learn him soon enough," was the opinion of a third.

Sarah heard not a word of this. She sat at the head of the coffin with her eyes fixed on the lifeless figure of her boy. There in the narrow confines of a funeral box lay the wreckage of all her hopes and love.

The spectators passed slowly on. In the file was a young girl, who drew near and stood longer than the others. She was holding up the line. She stooped over the coffin and kissed the mangled hand, kissed it with all the fervour of the crushed love of passionate youth. A solemn hush fell over the room, broken only by a girlish wail, "Lucy, oh, Lucy, I loved you so!" But when the startled onlookers turned to fix their gaze upon her, she was gone.

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"Who was that?" said Noah, turning to Esther.

"Elsa."

Sarah was terribly agitated. "It was that Elsa Reiber," she said, "her that dragged Cyrus down to this."

Three sermons they preached over Cyrus in the meeting-house, and then they buried him in the Wismer row in the graveyard. Fully a hundred people remained to witness the last sad rites, all of whom were invited back to the Horsts' for supper. Fortunately, the cooking held out, and the Bishop's reputation for the grace of hospitality was fully sustained.

When the strangers had all gone to their several homes, Noah took down the family Bible from its shelf and read the twelfth chapter of Ecclesiastes, which had been the burden of the preachers' discourses at the funeral. Then he lifted his voice in prayer, commending all his loved ones, both young and old, to the care of the great Father of all.

Sarah did not kneel with the others. She sat in her rocking chair, staring vacantly into space, and wailing out the last mortal words that fell from Cyrus' lips, "Home! Take me home!"

From that day Sarah was not herself. She was nervous. Her fingers twitched so that she could not hold her knitting-needles. Presently her whole body was trembling beyond her control. She could not pour a cup of tea, or carry it across the room. Every day she seemed worse instead of better. Doctor Scott was summoned, but he shook his head. The case was hope-

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less, he said. Mrs. Horst must have someone to wait upon her, hand and foot, for the rest of her days.

Esther shuddered. She gave one despairing look about her, then roused herself and went to her mother's side. "I'll take care of you, mom," she said. "You can look to me." She stooped down and tenderly adjusted the pillow behind her mother's head.

Sarah paid not the slightest attention. "Home!" she wailed. "Take me home! Oh, Lord, take me home!"

CHAPTER XIII

Grey Days

THE 60's were for the plain people years of intense religious emotion and commotion. A great Mennonite revival had broken out in Pennsylvania, and it had spread with all its heat and fury to the quiet community of Ebytown. It was fire sent down from heaven, its exponents verily believed, to burn the dross of worldliness and to purify their holy religion. But the burning was attended by such dense smoke-clouds of calumny and bitter dissension that some said they preferred the dross of their old religion to the unsightly, charred spectres left in the wake of the new.

It was the matter of personal religion that was to be tested with the fire from heaven. The promoters of the revival declared that the worship of the Mennonites had become too formal, too lifeless; the people were taking their spiritual life too much as a matter of course; children grew up in the ways of the meeting-house, but with no adequate idea of any personal relation to the great Head of the Church. True religion, they claimed, was pre-eminently a personal experience. "Ye must be born again." There must be a conscious, definite conviction of sin, a determined renunciation of the old life and a putting on of the new. Above all,

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there must be the witness of the Spirit, an unmistakable knowledge of sins forgiven, and a consciousness of adoption into the spiritual family of God. These things the Scriptures declared to be the great essentials of religion. No slipping into the spiritual life with a Mennonite garb above and a hardened, sinful, lustful heart beneath; no entrance ultimately beyond the pearly gates, unless, in this life which now is, the fallow soil of the soul had been ploughed and harrowed and planted with the seeds of a deep, personal and genuine contrition.

It was into this tornado of religious contention that Simeon Ernst stumbled. From earliest childhood he had been a serious boy, and spiritually-minded, finding in his Bible and in the deliberation of its teachings the greatest satisfaction of his life. Even his courting of Lydia and the Horsts had been brought to a successful issue through the medium of theological discussions. And now, at forty years of age, he had suddenly come to the realization that having all the forms of religion, he lacked, somehow, the soul. For years he had been a preacher, but he knew himself to be, at last, nothing but a lost sinner in the sight of God.

Poor Simeon spent many anxious days groping in the spiritual darkness which enveloped him. He could not eat; he could not sleep. The Spirit was striving mightily with him. Then one day the light broke upon him. He had gone out to plough a field in the back fifty acres of his father's farm. He had turned only a

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few furrows when suddenly there shone all about him a strange, celestial glory. Right into his innermost soul it penetrated. His heart glowed with a new joy; his face beamed with radiance. All life seemed permeated with a new meaning. For twenty years he had preached religion, a blind man leading the blind, and now, unexpectedly, the glorious light of a real, a satisfying religion had dawned upon his soul. He had been born again, and he knew it.

Happy Simeon! It was such a wonderful experience that he wanted to talk about it to everyone he met. The more he talked, the more he wanted to talk. When Sunday came he seized the opportunity to preach it in the meeting. Now with hallelujahs of praise upon his lips, and now with tears of joy coursing down his cheeks, he told his story. He had seen the error of trying to be satisfied with a cold, formal performance of religious duties. To preachers and congregation alike he sounded his warning. Religion is not a cloak that men put on like a garment, he said, but an intangible something that is born of God into the sanctuary of the human soul. It is heaven within. Praise His Holy Name!

An ominous silence pervaded the meeting-house when Simeon sat down. He had struck a new note in worship. Some there were who welcomed it as the earnest of a mighty revival, but others looked on askance. Emotion had no place in the religion of Mennonites, these latter said. It was sure to stir up, not religion, but that anomaly known as religious

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strife. What it had done elsewhere it would do in Ebytown. Homes would be rent asunder and members of the same family would become estranged. The larger brotherhood of the church would be disrupted. They were filled with apprehension about it. Whatever they did, they must be cautious.

But Simeon Ernst's ardour knew no bounds. If there were those who hung back, they only manifested to him their greater need. So, with an indomitable will and with a tireless energy, he threw himself into the task of leading those who walked in darkness into the light which he himself had found. He longed to carry burning coals from off the altar of his heart to kindle in other hearts the fires of a genuine religion. The people turned all the days of the week into Lord's days, and Simeon instituted evening prayer-meetings in their homes, a practice hitherto unknown to the Mennonites. They became earnest, distraught, panicky, and the Spirit began to manifest itself in countless ways. Sinners dead in their trespasses and sins were reclaimed, the self-righteous cried aloud for mercy, enemies of a lifetime were reconciled at the penitent bench. There could be no doubt about it, God Himself was pleased to come down and bless His people.

Encouraged by these evidences of divine favour, Simeon then turned his attention to the children. They needed instruction, training, that early they might find the way of life. Sunday-schools sprang up in different localities, and Simeon went about from one to the other, exhorting, admonishing, persuading. Here,

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too, he had many souls for his hire. The Lord was using His servant in a marvellous way. Hallelujah to His Name!

Wider and wider grew Simeon's sphere of influence. From little communities of plain people living in far-off, isolated parts of Upper Canada came the Macedonian cry. They, too, wanted a revival of religion. Would Simeon not come to them and bring live coals from off the altars in Ebytown? Would he not fan for them the fires of religious ecstasy? Simeon could not but heed their cry. From one village to another he went as a flaming evangel, with his Bible under his arm and his new-found religion in his heart. Old truths took on a new meaning as he preached, and sluggish souls were fired with a new zeal. Everywhere there was a forsaking of sin and a turning to the Lord. Praise Him!

Simeon lived now in a holy delirium of joy. Such happiness he had never known in the old life. He was experiencing heaven below. The Lord was doing it, of course. Simeon was only letting Him have His way. It was He who had brought him up to this great mountain-top of religious experience. Hallelujah!

Simeon longed to pitch his tent in that rare atmosphere and dwell there forever. But one day it became painfully evident that he must descend before long into the valley and return to his home at Ebytown. His last pair of socks were out at the toes; his last shirt was on his back. So he packed his satchel

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and brought it to his wife. "Here, Lydy," he said, "look at what I fetched you."

Lydia was patching the seat of a pair of juvenile trousers and did not look up.

Simeon wondered what could be the matter. "Ain't you glad to see me, Lydy?" he made bold to ask.

"Glad? What for?" Lydia looked at him coldly over her spectacles. "What did you fetch me? Nothing but more work, and of that I've got enough already."

Simeon bit his lip. This was not the sort of welcome the women accorded him when he was out on his tours. Lydia was getting old and crabbed, he decided. He ventured to intimate that he was hungry.

"We are et already," replied his wife. The clock had just struck two.

"At five o'clock already I had my breakfast," said Simeon. His appetite was ravenous now. He grasped his armchair with both hands and drew it after him to his place at table. Then he sat and waited.

Lydia went on patching.

"Ain't you going to fetch me something?" demanded the famishing husband, at last. This was too much. What was a wife for anyway, if not to wait upon her husband?

Lydia did not reply, but she put aside her work and went to the kitchen. After a few minutes she returned with a bowl of milk and a crust of bread.

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With defiance, she set it before the lord of the household.

"What's this for a dinner?" cried Simeon, aghast.

"It's all I have."

"All you have? What's happened to the potatoes?"

"They're all."

"And the meat?"

"I could not butcher alone."

"No coffee, even. You know how good I like coffee."

"There's things I like, too, worse than coffee."

Really, the devil himself was in Lydia. "Why didn't you go and get some at the store?"

"I had no money."

"But Bombergers would let you have it without," protested Simeon. "They ought to, anyway, after all you've bought from them."

Lydia tossed her head indignantly. "To home we don't ever eat till it's paid for," she said. "Us Horsts."

Simeon stroked his beard and deliberated. It was going to require all the religion he had acquired up on the mountain-top to tide him over this little controversy with his own wife. The trouble was, he suspected, that Lydia did not know this new religion. She was too much engrossed with the things of this world. She must be born again. It was foolish of her to worry, he told her, at length. All she had to do was to tell his father, or hers, and every want would be supplied.

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Lydia burst unexpectedly into a tempest of tears. "You want me to beg yet," she sobbed. "I will starve for you, Simeon, but beg I will not, no, not for nobody. Us Horsts wasn't brought up to beg."

"You are too proud," said Simeon, in a cold, sacerdotal tone. "Pride is an abomination to the Lord, and money is the root of all evil. You must have more faith, Lydia."

"It's the love of money that's the root," corrected Lydia. "Eat your dinner, Simeon. Till that's done, the cellar is empty. Then you can see how much groceries you can get with your faith. Not one pound of coffee, even."

"The money will come from somewhere," insisted Simeon. "We must have faith. It will come."

"With all your preaching you get none," Lydia reminded him. "You can run your legs off with your meetings. They feed you good, yes, but I can set to home and starve. Ain't you soon done with your religion, Simeon?"

"Ain't I done with it?"

"Won't you stop to home, I mean. I have it so hard. Our girls are all boys and no help to me. They won't work. They're running wild, like the weeds on the farm."

Simeon knew the remedy. "We must pray for them," he said, "pray without ceasing."

"In season and out of season?"

"Yes."

"If I was strong enough, I'd pray with the strap,"

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said Lydia. "Look at Cyrus and Daniel the way they went in that heathen city. That learned me a lesson with boys. Boys need a man to fetch them up right. They need you. If the Lord would 've wanted me to do it, He would 've sent girls. But boys! boys! boys! every time till it's seven already. You're running away from the work the Lord gave you to do. You're shoving it all on me. What good does your religion do you, if you haven't got no sense?"

Simeon found justification for his conduct of life in the Scriptures themselves. A man's foes are those of his own household, he quoted. Having put his hand to the plough, he dared not look back for father, wife or son. He had fixed his eyes upon heavenly things, and he must continue to do so. Lydia must learn to trust, and trust implicitly. "The Lord will provide," he said, and he pointed to a sampler on the wall. "That you worked long before you got me, Lydy. It's the same Lord as then. He don't change ever."

To demonstrate the good Lord's providential care, Simeon went to his mother's pantry and satisfied his hunger. He returned with a quantity of provisions and with the promise that his parents would look after Lydia and the boys in his absence. That evening he had a short but earnest conversation with his sons, commending them to the care of the Lord. Next morning he was off again for another jaunt with his satchel full of clean clothes. No sooner was he out of sight of his father's farm than he forgot his duty

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as a parent and as a provider. He was all afire to garner precious souls from the byways of life and to bring them into the harvest of the Lord.

Manassah Horst was among those whose hearts the revival had touched, but Simeon had doubts about the genuineness of his conversion, since Manassah declined to become emotional over it. "It don't look to me like the real thing," he told Manassah. "It don't sound right."

"It's not always the man that makes the most noise that has the best religion," replied Manassah, deliberately, as usual.

"A dead cat don't meow," retorted the preacher. "Say, Manassah, do you mind yet that night we went to Shade's Mills?"

"In the bob-sleigh?"

"Yes, to fight about the county town. I can see those men yet, how they carried on."

"And I can't get it out of my head how you acted," said Manassah.

"Me? Why, what did I do wrong?"

"Everything. You made Levi stop to home so you could go, and then you talked all the time religion."

"And what's wrong with that?"

"A political meeting is to talk politics," replied Manassah.

"If you can't take your religion there, you'd best not go at all," advised Simeon.

Manassah made haste to explain that his religion was a part of him, that he took it with him wherever

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he went. If he did not always talk it, he tried to carry out its precepts in his everyday life.

Simeon was full of argumentation. Why shouldn't he talk religion, anywhere, everywhere, he wanted to know, even at a political meeting, if he wanted to? Wasn't religion the greatest thing, the only really important thing in life? Politics? A passing show. And yet people went mad over politics, fairly cracking their throats over the petty issues of the day. But because he felt constrained to shout eternal verities to sin-stopped ears, people said he was crazy. Was there any consistency in that? Was there, now? "The Lord had a hand in sending me to that meeting," he declared. "He was calling me even then to shout His religion like the men of the world shout their politics."

Manassah never could argue successfully with Simeon. It was because Simeon wouldn't listen to reason, he thought. Besides, Manassah felt bound to confess that he had a sneaking interest in world affairs, and he wasn't prepared to relinquish it because Simeon's too tender conscience told him it was of the devil. He spent hours poring over *The Ebytown Announcer's* pot-pourri of European events; he tried to understand the problems of people of other lands and races. But chiefly he was interested in all that pertained to the land of his birth, and in what was going on in the Parliament Buildings in Toronto. For the life of him, he could not see anything wrong in that, so long as he did not allow himself to be ensnared into any too active participation in political life.

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"The devil sets his traps everywhere," Simeon warned him. "Before you know it, pop goes the weasel. Watch out, Manassah!"

The slightest opposition or criticism was only fresh fuel to Simeon's zeal. He was determined to die rather than depart one jot or one tittle from the faith that was in him. That was the principle of the martyrs, and a martyr he would be.

The work grew apace. Some of the leading members had professed the new birth. The Spirit of God was being shed abroad in the hearts of the people. Like a bit of leaven hidden in a measure of meal, it was leavening the whole lump.

Old Josiah Ernst was a devout man and disposed to be lenient with the vagrancies of his son. This religion of his was a bubble of religious excitement, which would burst and evaporate in time, he thought, and Simeon would return to his normal life on the farm. But a year and more had passed. The farm was overrun with weeds, and the bubble was still soaring. Something must be done.

The old man confronted Simeon one day with his duty. "Have I got to feed youse all yet in my old age?" he said.

"You don't have to feed me," replied Simeon. "I eat where I stop. The labourer is worthy of his hire."

"But her and the boys."

"The boys can work."

"But they won't. They don't know how."

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"Why don't you learn them? You learned me when I was younger than them."

"They won't learn," claimed Old Josiah. "They won't listen to me. I am too old. They need you, Simeon."

But Simeon steadfastly maintained that he had heard the call to greater service, and he must obey. That day when he was ploughing in the back fifties, the voice of God had told him to go and sow the seeds of repentance in the hearts of the people.

The old man reflected a moment, hesitating to be little in any way the call divine. And yet . . . "If you would go back and plough again chust once in the back fifties," he suggested, at last, "mebbe the Lord has something else He wants to say to you."

It was equally useless to ridicule, to reason, or to entreat. Simeon was "sot," immovably "sot". He had put his hand to the plough of the Spirit, he told his father again, and he dared not turn back. He and the Lord were going on together through ploughing and seed-time to His great harvest at the end of the world. Hallelujah!

When the seeds of Simeon's sowing began to sprout, there sprang up with them the tares of contention and strife. There were some who doubted Simeon's sanity as well as his religion. The whole revival was of the devil, they said. Everywhere there was suspicion and mistrust. Unkind thoughts were haroured, hard things were said. Soon the whole congregation was seething with malice and hatred.

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"And this they call religion," said Noah Horst, the Bishop, when things had come to a terrible pass. "Well, if it is, it's not the kind I want."

"Me, neither," said Josiah Ernst. "We used to have it good till this here revival had to come along. Now look at what we've got. Nobody trusts nobody. It's all hate."

"I told Simeon long ago already he's going too far," said Noah.

Josiah had told him, too, but that was all the good it did.

It was not long before Simeon took the fatal step which brought him into open conflict with the heads of the church. So long as he held his week-night prayer-meetings and his Sunday-schools in the homes of the people, nothing much could be done about it, but when he carried his so-called fanaticism into the meeting-house, that was another matter. One Sunday morning Simeon called down a revival from heaven in the regular congregation. In a voice pitched high with excitement, he urged the people to come and kneel in contrition around the pulpit, confessing their sins. There was a great crying to the Lord. Such emotion had not been heard before in all the history of the Ebytown meeting-house.

It was after this service that Noah Horst took his stand. Simeon's performance was not going to be repeated. He would put a stop to it. Simeon Ernst had been untrue to the traditions of the people called Mennonites. His name must be struck off the roll.

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When Lydia heard the news, she hurried to her father in great alarm. It was not right, she protested. Simeon had done no wrong. He had done no violence to any of the doctrines of the Mennonites. He hadn't conformed to the world, had he?

"No," Noah was compelled to admit.

"And he didn't take the law?"

"No," again.

"Vengeance he did not show," said the distressed woman, "that I know. His heart is full of love for them even that talks the hardest against him."

"No, Lydy," said the bishop. "He showed no vengeance."

"And he preached what he found in the Bible," maintained the loyal wife. "All his texts I read there already."

Noah's case seemed to weaken with every defence Lydia made. He groped around for some accusation he might lay to Simeon's charge. "He didn't preach down infant baptism like he might, or war, neither," he said, at length.

"How could he?" replied Lydia. "He was all the time preaching up the new birth."

Ah! the new birth. That was the rub. Noah declared that Simeon was off on a false road. It would lead him dear only knew where.

"Ye must be born again," quoted Lydia.

Noah shook his head. "In my Bible it says 'What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God'. That's

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the Mennonite religion. If it ain't good enough for Simeon, he can go."

"He will," said Lydia, tossing her head contemptuously. "My name you can strike off, too. Him and me will never darken the door of your meeting-house again. Nor your door, neither."

"Lydy!"

But Lydia was off, hurrying down the road towards her home in the country.

"Lydy! Come back!" Noah called it at the top of his voice. "Lydy!"

Lydia marched steadfastly on.

Poor Noah! Like some dejected patriarch he stood, his eyes swimming and his long beard blowing in the wind. Another hope shattered! Another dark blot on the escutcheon of his life!

The next day was Sunday, and when Levi called, as usual, in the afternoon, Noah was not yet up. He had a high fever, Esther said. Little wonder, either, after all the worry he had had with Simeon and Lydia on top of all the dissension in the church.

"There's nothing more devilish than a church fight," opined Levi, addressing himself to Manassah.

Manassah could not give his assent to such a sweeping statement. He didn't see why people shouldn't differ on matters of religion as well as on politics, for example. It seemed to him that Simeon and his father were both right. At least, they were both conscientious.

"They preach the same gospel," said Levi, "at least

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they find it in the same Bible. One hangs to a text here, and another hitches himself to a verse there, and before they know it, they're scratching each other's eyes out."

"It's human nature," Manassah thought.

"Yes, but they call it Christianity," laughed Levi.

Manassah did not give up the argument. The strength of Christianity, he maintained, was the result of its struggles. The revival that had come down upon them was a godsend, even if it should split the church. It had stirred them up. They knew now what they really believed.

Levi smiled. "I don't give that for what a man believes," he said, snapping his fingers with emphasis. "It's how he acts that counts. What good is a man's religion if he can't live it? Say, Manassah, tell me."

Manassah did not know.

"If he lives right six days of a week," continued Levi, "if he does as he would be done by, I don't care a cookie what church he sleeps in on Sundays."

"That's another idea," said Manassah, with a laugh. "I can't quite agree with you. I say, if he lives right, he'll sleep nights to home in his bed."

On Monday, Noah was worse. Doctor Scott came. It was fever, typhoid, he feared. He must have every attention. Was there someone to wait on him?

"Me," said Esther.

"But you have your mother."

"Yes, her I have, too."

"Does she eat well?"

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"Pretty good," replied Esther, "but I must feed her always."

"Does she dress herself now?"

"No," said Esther. "About all she can do is shake."

The doctor's eye fell upon little Mary. "The child," he said. "Couldn't you send her away?"

"Send Mary away!" gasped Esther. "I couldn't. She would make strange."

"Just for a few weeks," urged the doctor. "Your sister would take her."

"She has plenty of her own," Esther told him. "Seven boys."

Doctor Scott threw up his hands. This was certainly no place for a dainty little girl like Mary.

"I can't let her go anywhere," declared Esther. "You don't know what good company she makes me. She's all I have."

"But who's to do the work?"

"Me. Mary will help."

The doctor left medicines and directions and went on his way.

From day to day, Noah kept getting worse. If only they could get some one to nurse him, but everybody, it seemed, was afraid of the fever.

They had not reckoned on Lydia. She came in their hour of need, more afraid of her conscience, she said, than of death itself.

"Lydy!" cried Esther, overjoyed.

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"This is no place for you," said the doctor, sternly. "You with your seven boys."

Lydia did not wait to answer. She was off to her father's bedside, bending over his fevered body and entreating him to forgive her.

Noah stirred. He recognized her. "It's all right, Lydy," he whispered. "Now I can die happy."

"Won't he live?" Lydia asked Esther at her first opportunity. "Don't the doctor hold out no hope?"

"He says he will give him a week or ten days at the most," said Esther. "Can you stop that long, Lydy? Can the boys make out without you?"

"I told them I was going to stop to the end," replied Lydia.

So Lydia stayed on, in spite of the doctor's protests. She never left her father by day or by night. It was she who cooled his fevered brow and quenched his parched lips, she who read to him his Bible. They were happy now, father and daughter, for their hearts were full of tenderest love.

Then came the terrible hours of crisis. Lydia stood in silence, watching now her father's face and now the doctor's. She prayed, as Simeon always admonished her to do, without ceasing.

Presently the doctor's face lit up with hope. "He's going to live," he said. "With good care, there is no reason. . ."

Lydia was staggering. She seized the bed post to save herself from falling. Everything went suddenly black before her eyes. They put her to bed,

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where she should have been days before, the doctor said. Preposterous! Why hadn't they told him she wasn't getting her sleep? And seven boys! He was a fool to have allowed it.

"Is it the fever?" asked Esther, fearfully.

"No, it's the whooping cough," sputtered Dr. Scott, impatiently. "And who's to nurse her, that's what I want to know."

"Me."

"You? Can't you get help from Manassah's?"

"He's down with it, too," said Esther, "right in the thick of the harvest."

"Harvest be blowed!" exploded the doctor. He went over to Manassah's like a shot.

Down in the town the old homestead was designated by a new name, the fever-house. They might as well have called it a pest-house. The women brought baskets of provisions, but left them at the gate; the men who came to offer a hand in the harvest ate their meals at home. No one would drink a drop of water on the premises. Not a soul would enter the house, save the doctor and Levi Gingerich. Even the passers-by sought to protect themselves from contagion by cutting a temporary road through the fields. Neither Asiatic cholera nor the leprosy could have struck more abject terror into the hearts of the people of Ebytown.

Those were sad and lonely days for Esther. A groan, a moan, a complaint, and work, endless work, these filled her day. From bedside to bedside she

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went, only to be recalled to Sarah's rocking chair. Again and again she listened to the monotonous wail, "Home! Home! Take me home!"

Little Mary was the joy of Esther's heart during those long, wearisome days. She used to stop sometimes between duties to listen to the child crooning a lullaby to Sally Ann, her priceless rag doll, and the prattle rang in Esther's ears all through the day like a haunting obligato. "Be good, Sally Ann. If you don't be good now, you can't be like Estie till you're growed. That's what my daddy says, and he knows everything. He knows everything, Sally Ann!"

"Don't you want to play with Belinda now?" Esther asked one day.

"No, not yet."

"But Belinda is a lovely doll, Mary, and your daddy gave her to you."

It was no use. Scarcely a look would the child bestow upon the costly Belinda, but she hugged Sally Ann to her bosom. "I love you, Sally Ann," she gurgled. "Next to Estie, I love you. Do you hear, Sally Ann?"

The doctor's efforts to find someone to help at the Horsts' proved successful at last. He brought a woman with him one day and deposited her satchel on the kitchen table. His face beamed with satisfaction. "Here's a real womanly woman," he said. "Her name is Miss Reiber."

"Elsa!" cried Esther. "Why did you come?"

The girl waited until the doctor's back was turned

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before she answered. "It's for him," she said, then.

"For Cyrus, you mean?"

"Yes, for Lucy. I always called him that. You know how it was with him and me?"

Esther thought she did. "You loved him?" she said.

"Yes," said Elsa, very softly. "Do you know, too, what love is?"

Esther blushed, hesitating to make so great a confession to a comparative stranger.

Elsa knew the signs infallible. "I'm so glad," she said, "for then you know how I feel. You won't send me away."

"Send you away?" said Esther. "Why, you're almost like a sister."

Elsa stopped only a minute to hug her new friend, and then she put on a big apron and began a tour of exploration about her new kingdom in the kitchen of her loved Lucy's home. It seemed as though she had never been so happy in all her life before.

The patients progressed indifferently. Sarah was, if possible, more petulant, more exacting than ever. She would not tolerate Elsa in her presence. Let her keep to the kitchen. The Bishop was improving steadily. Not so, Lydia, who lay listlessly, almost lifelessly, on her bed, too ill to be moved.

"Send for her husband," Dr. Scott ordered, one day.

"She's not going to go, is she?" cried Esther. "Not to die?"

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"Send for her husband."

But Simeon was nowhere to be found. He was off conducting revival meetings in some remote region, nobody knew exactly where. Before the message reached him Lydia's gentle spirit had departed to take up its residence in that other home, eternal in the heavens.

"She said she would stop till the end," said Esther, "but we didn't think it was going to end like this."

"The ways of the Lord are past finding out," said Noah.

"Home! Take me home!" wailed Sarah from her corner. "Oh, Lord, if only you would 've took me. . ."

Little Mary was left pretty much to the pursuit of her own devices during these distressing days. Very often her faithful Sally Ann was her constant and her sole companion. But one day the child was alarmed to find that there was something wrong with Sally Ann. She had a great hole in her skin, and the insides were all coming out. It made the dolly very ill, indeed; so ill, in fact, that Mary decided to take her to the doctor.

She knew the doctor was busy, but she was not prepared to see her Sally Ann and her ailment brushed aside. He didn't feel her pulse, nor look at her tongue. He didn't even leave a bottle of pink medicine. Some other day he would attend her, he said. Little Mary was worried to no end about it.

Of course, Sally Ann had the fever. She was

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burning up with it. Little Mary put her dolly into the cradle and rocked her assiduously. All morning she nursed her, but the terrible hole did not show any signs of healing. In the afternoon Sally Ann grew worse and worse. About five o'clock she died. Little Mary shed hot tears over the corpse. The funeral was held without delay. The child had found a paste-board box, into which she laid the lifeless form of her dolly, and she dug a hole in the back yard for the grave. The last sad obsequies were interrupted by a call to supper.

"I don't want any supper," little Mary called back. "I can't eat."

"Can't eat?" cried Esther. "How's that?"

"I don't feel to eat," said the child. "Sally Ann's dead."

Esther smiled sadly. What an imagination the child did have! She called her in, induced her to eat something and put her to bed. But she had an uncomfortable feeling about little Mary.

During the night the fever heightened. Mary lay in her little bed hugging the resurrected Sally Ann and whispering, "I've got it, too, the fever. I'm burning up with it."

"Hush," said Esther, trying to be cheerful. "Dr. Scott will make you better."

Little Mary had no faith in the doctor. "He let Sally Ann die," she said. "Can Sally Ann go with me in the box when I die? Can she, Estie?"

"Hush, hush!" sobbed Esther. "Oh, Mary, you

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must not die. What would Estie do without her little girl?"

"And what would Sally Ann do without me?" replied the child. "She's my little girl, Sally Ann." She hugged the inanimate bundle of rags to her heart.

The doctor came in the morning, and with him, Levi, in great distress.

"She's got it, too," sobbed Esther. "Oh, Levi, if only I would 've sent her away. The doctor told me to."

"Only because I saw your hands were too full," the doctor said, "I never dreamed the little one would take it."

"Where would you have sent her?" said Levi.

"I thought about Rhoda, but I couldn't. . ."

Levi's reply was decisive and emphatic. "Rhoda has no heart. Besides, you needed her."

"Precisely," agreed the doctor. "Now let's talk no more about it."

Sometimes the child was rational enough and chatted with Levi and Esther, but for hours at a time she was off in some wild delirium. Day by day she grew weaker. The doctor held out little hope for her recovery.

Levi never left the little bed, and Esther came and stood beside it whenever she had a moment to spare. They were both there when the end came. There was no struggle, only a closing of those bright eyes upon the light of the world until they should open again in that brighter, better world beyond.

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Levi sobbed aloud when he saw the last flicker of mortal life on the face of his dying child. It seemed as though the light of his life had suddenly gone out and he was left to grope alone in the darkness. Little Mary was all he had in the world and he loved her so. Mary!

Esther stole softly, silently, to his side. She placed her hand upon his shoulder. "Levi!" she whispered.

The grief-stricken man stirred. A voice had called in the darkness. He was not alone. He covered Esther's small hand with his large, strong one, and said her name very softly, "Esther!"

"You have me yet, Levi." The words slipped out in that unguarded moment when their hearts were stirred by their common sorrow. In that sad yet happy moment they looked unabashed into each other's tear-dimmed eyes and knew that they also had a common hope. It was a cheerful thought, though shrouded for the time being in the uncertainty of futurity.

"Esther!" It was Sarah who called, thinly but insistently from her invalid chair in the front room. "Esther! Come here once!"

"I must go," said the girl, withdrawing her hand gently from Levi's grasp.

The call of duty is ever stern. In Esther's case, its performance was a succession of trivialities. Her mother wanted her right foot put over her left. A few minutes and she would ask to have the operation reversed. It was so hard sitting there all day long. So hard.

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"She's gone," Esther announced, with a break in her voice.

"Her?"

"Yes. Little Mary."

"Is she chust went?"

"Yes, Levi is with her now."

Sarah heaved a deep-brought sigh. "And here I must set," she said. "Sometimes I wonder did the Lord forget me."

"I don't think he ever did remember me," said Esther. Her cup was running over with bitterness.

Sarah turned on her a pair of disapproving eyes. "I'm sure you've got it good," she said.

Yes, comparatively speaking, Esther had it "good". The lines had fallen to her in pleasant places. She had a goodly heritage, health, wealth, a sound mind, and happiness of a kind. The road she travelled was straight and safe, but it was the way of duty, narrow, lonely and commonplace. The by-paths were so alluring. Through flowery meadows and by rivers of water they led convivially on, it seemed, to the land of her heart's desire. Esther's eyes ached for a sight of that earthly paradise, but she knew that it was not for her. Footsore and weary, she must trudge along the highway of duty; she must carry her burden to the end. Ever and anon there came to her the memory of words she had heard in the long ago, and their truth was borne in upon her mind, "Those that will carry, can."

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Three o'clock. Time for her father's medicine. No little Mary to shake the bottle for her. No one to help her count the drops. "Oh, Mary! Mary!" she murmured, "Estie loves you so."

They placed the child in her little coffin with Sally Ann, her rag doll, and they laid her lovingly to rest. The old homestead never seemed the same again. In time the fever abated and life became more normal, but the sunshine had departed from the house and the clouds of grief hung heavy.

Towards the close of the year, old blind Gross-doddy Wismer departed this life in the eighty-eighth year of his age. He slipped away one night in his sleep, and somewhere beyond the veil he opened his wondering eyes upon the beautiful City of God. His old, black armchair stood empty now, where Sarah had always maintained it must stand when he should leave it, beside the kitchen stove in the old Wismer homestead.

"The young are took, and the old," was Sarah's constant complaint now, "but here I must set."

"It's the Lord's doings, Sarai," Noah kept reminding her. "We must let it all to Him."

Not even Sarah could doubt the ruling of a beneficent Providence in the case of Simeon Ernst's motherless family. Three months of widowers' tears, and then Simeon's eyes met Leah's at her father's funeral. Three months more of happy anticipation and Leah became his wife. Too great a disparity of ages, some

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thought, but Simeon seemed satisfied. He required, first and foremost, a housekeeper, and Leah was well-preserved, she had money and she needed a home. Let the busy world talk.

CHAPTER XIV

The World Encroaches

WHILE Simeon Ernst was devoting himself unreservedly to religion, Levi Gingerich was listening to the siren call of politics. On the horizon of that great world there was looming up a question of greatest importance in world history. It was concerned with the possible consolidation of the British possessions in North America into one federated unit. There had been a conference in Charlottetown to discuss the matter, and another later in Quebec. Levi was keeping his ears to the ground. If such a union should be consummated, it would mean much for the country, and it might mean the realization of some ambitions he had cherished in secret for many years.

Manassah was interested, too, in the political situation, despite the deterrent influence of the prevailing revival. There were some novel features about the proposition which caught his fancy and which seemed to justify his interest. In all the history of the world, he knew of no country that had not been born in the blood and gore of battlefields. The story of the nations was a long chronicle of wars and the devastations of war. Was it possible, he asked himself, that in the outposts of the British Empire there should

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one day arise among the nations a child, whose glorious birth should not be marred by travail and the welter of blood? Could this be the herald of that great era of peace and brotherly love, so long awaited?

It looked as though Manassah's hopes and Levi's ambitions might be realized in due time, for on the first day of July, 1867, the greater Canada was born. On that glad day not a bayonet was fixed, not a sword was drawn. The cannon boomed, but joyfully, to announce to a happy people the consummation of their hopes. Yes, a new nation had been born in the Northland. Let the world rejoice. Vast territories of land, rich in resources and potentialities, were its birthright, the glorious traditions of the great nations of the world, its proud heritage. Favoured Canada!

The natal day of the new Dominion was the occasion of great rejoicing in Ebytown. The celebration began with the dawn, and at nightfall the day was far from spent. Very early the entire population was astir with excitement, and by eight o'clock the bands of the county had arrived and were parading about the streets playing martial airs. The crowds were enormous. Where did the people all come from? Flags were unfurled from the houses, bunting was strung across the streets. Soon the volunteers from the neighbouring towns and villages were marching down King Street, resplendent in their redcoats, stepping out to a lively tune, and whetting their appetites, no doubt, for the anticipated noon-day feast.

There never was such a dinner as was served in the

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drill-hall to two hundred and fifty of the leading men of the county. Three rows of improvised tables fairly groaned with choice German dishes, wurst, sauerkraut and speck. And schnopps, there were gallons of it. Such hilarity! Such fun! Everybody sang whether he could or not, everybody ate until he couldn't.

When the feast was over, the speeches began. There were the usual toasts to the Queen, to the Prince of Wales and the Royal Family, and then the banquetters pledged their hearts' loyalty to Canada, the new Dominion. They cast a retrospective glance over the past, then turned their prophetic eyes and peered into the dimness of the future. Great cities, they saw, teeming with population and busy with the commerce of the world. Hidden mines were discovered and operated, the prairies, tilled. From coast to coast Britain across the seas was bound by bands of steel but more closely still by those cords of love which united them to their common motherland. They toasted the Governor-General and his statesmen, and promised them their whole-hearted support. Nor did they forget *The Ebytown Announcer* and the radiant host whose vintage had left nothing to be desired. Altogether, it was an occasion long to be remembered. Throughout the day five thousand people demonstrated their patriotism and devotion to the new Dominion which was to be to them and to their children's children their much-loved Canadian homeland.

Manassah incurred the displeasure of his father as well as that of his brother-in-law by compromising with

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the world to the extent of attending the big dinner. He had been invited to sit at the head table with Levi Gingerich. They were an abstemious, serious-minded pair, whose chief concern was not the noisy celebration of the day but a consideration of the outlook which the federation afforded for the future.

"And now that we've got this big Canada," said Manassah, "who's to govern it? That's what I wonder."

"Why, we must," replied Levi. "We, the people, you know."

"But for a big country it needs big men," maintained Manassah.

"And if our men aren't big enough," was Levi's answer, "they'll have to grow. I tell you, Manassah, I'd like to get a chance at it some day."

Manassah dropped his knife and stared at him. "You!" he cried, in a none-too-complimentary tone of voice.

Levi confessed that to be his chief ambition.

"You? Politics?"

Levi laughed. "Is it me that's no good, or the politics?" he said.

"You are a Mennonite."

"That's what they tell me over in the Methodist Church where my name's written down," replied Levi. "I'm so Mennonitish in my ways, they say."

"You came by it honestly," Manassah reminded him.

"All that is good in me I owe to the Mennonites,"

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said Levi, wholeheartedly. "I'll stick up for them, no matter what. But politics, I always did hanker after them. It started that day I couldn't go with you to Shade's Mills to fight about the county-town."

"They're of the world, politics," argued Manassah.

"And we're of the world, too," replied Levi. "At least, we're in it. Is it wrong to try to make the world better? Say, Manassah, is it?"

"Ach, no, but . . . I know how you feel, Levi. I hanker, too, sometimes to mix with the world. I wish I could do something for this new Canada that we've got. It's a temptation I have. I must hold myself so in."

Levi felt just the opposite about it. He saw in his inclination to public life a call to public service, a call which he dared not disregard. "It will do our Canada good," he said, "if we can get some Mennonite ideas into the government. I'm going to try. Why should I sit and fold my hands and let the devil's crowd run the country? Will you vote for me, say?"

"Wote for you, Levi? You don't mean you're going to be a Member of Parliament?"

"Eat your pie, Manassah. Of course I am. They want me to run."

"Well, if you do," said Manassah, "you won't need my wote to get in. But don't be rash, Levi. Think once where it will lead you."

"That we don't have to worry about," Levi thought. "We can't see the end of our life from the beginning. Only one step at a time we must go."

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"You started out to be a teacher, but your Uncle Joe stopped that, coming like he did with all his money."

"Yes," said Levi, "Uncle Joe and her—Veronica. I must have an office to suit her, and then I got so tied up with my money that I couldn't get out. And next I'm getting into life insurance."

Manassah stopped eating again. "Life insurance!" he ejaculated. Here was another evidence, if he needed it, that Levi was treading the broad way of the great world. "Life insurance! You are going in to that, did you say?"

"Yes, Manassah, your ears are hearing right."

"Shutting up your other shop?"

"No, the company isn't formed yet. I've got to start it."

"So? And did it grow out of your head?"

Levi had to confess that it was not his idea. His work was to carry out the ideas which cleverer minds had evolved. Brilliant ideas they were, too, and new. In this company which he was to manage, the shareholders were to be not a corporation of wealthy men but the entire body of shareholders. Nothing was to be invested but the premiums. It would mean the maximum protection at the minimum cost. Safe as the Bank of England.

Manassah was interested. He inquired how many policy-holders they would need.

"Five hundred to start," Levi told him. "The idea is to get them to unite and by their premiums provide

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the funds to float the company. It's to go all over Canada soon. You're in my book, Manassah, for one of the five hundred. I want to give you the chance, good friends like we are, but I've got an extra name at the bottom of the list."

Manassah laughed. "You have such a way with you, Levi," he said. "You can get anything you want, but not from me—not with life insurance. I don't hold to any kind of insurance. Not even a lightning-rod will I have on my barn, you know that, Levi. It is a defiance to God."

Levi had heard that argument before. "I'm not selling lightning-rods," he said. "It's life insurance I'm talking about." He pointed out its humanitarian aspect. It was such a boon to widows and orphans. That was why he was interested in it primarily, he thought. "It takes an orphan to feel for orphans," he said.

Manassah allowed himself a guttural expression of disapproval. "Tell me," he said, "where do you find it in the Bible that widows and orphans must trust in life insurance? Tell me one place, say. I've read already how God cares for His own, the sparrows and the lilies of the field. And he counts the hair of our heads yet. 'Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive,' it says, 'and let thy widows trust in me.' But you say we must go and get insured. What did life insurance do for you, Levi?"

"Nothing," was the answer, "but if I would 've had it. . ."

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"Shame, Levi," cried Manassah. "Not a copper did you have, but did you starve ever? Who sent your Uncle Joe, eh?"

"The Horsts did more for me than Uncle Joe," Levi avowed. "But will you shove your children out on the world when you die, Manassah? Will you leave them to charity?"

"There'll be ten thousand for every one of them," was the answer. It was no idle boast, either.

"But if you would lose it and die poor?"

"Then somebody must help. I would do the same for them. We must bear one another's burdens."

Levi saw his opportunity, and he seized it. He launched forth into an explanation of the principles of life insurance. It was nothing more nor less than a society of friends, neighbours and acquaintances, banded together in a larger way to bear the burden of any one of their number whom death might call.

"It's nothing but a gamble," exploded Manassah. "A lottery, that's what it is. What right have my children to money I did not earn? I don't want to give them the idea they can get something without working for it. That's not the way to fetch them up."

Levi was ready to refute this argument. Insurance was no lottery, he declared, but a scientific business. The company takes no financial risk, for it knows in advance the approximate number of losses it will be called upon to meet and through its rates it collects the necessary amount. Insurance rests, he said, upon

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two solid bases, the law of human mortality and the law of compound interest.

"It's the men you insure that does the gambling," said Manassah.

"It's the man that don't insure that takes the chance," Levi maintained. "Death is certain, and everybody knows it. The man who will not insure his life gambles with fate, and the widow and the children have to pay the stakes."

"It's no use talking, Levi, I ain't going to take your life insurance."

"You think it is wrong?"

"I think it is exceedingly sinful."

"Then, for you, it is wrong," said Levi, slipping his little book of prospectives back into his pocket. "To me it looks different. I think it is a man's duty."

"That don't make it so," said Manassah, a trifle dogmatically. "It only goes to show that when you mix with the people of the world, it don't go long till you are throwing with them."

It wasn't very long, indeed, before Manassah himself was in imminent danger of "throwing with the world". At least, he got tangled up with municipal affairs, and it was with some difficulty that he finally extricated himself. It happened that Ebytown wanted a town hall in keeping with the dignity and importance of the municipality, and Manassah had offered to build it for the sum of fifteen thousand dollars. There were no specifications, there was no inspection. Manassah Horst could be trusted in every circumstance of

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life. When the building was completed, it was found to be eminently satisfactory to the last detail. To show their appreciation of Manassah's integrity, the people elected him mayor by acclamation. Manassah thanked them for the honour which he had not coveted, presided over one meeting of the council and then abdicated. "It don't suit to my religion," he explained. "Us Mennonites ain't for getting ourselves in high places. 'If any man would be great, let him be the servant of all'."

When election time came, Levi Gingerich was in the very thick of the tussle. He had been given the nomination of the Liberal party, and he intended to leave no stone unturned to win his way into the House of Commons. His genial manner stood him in good stead, and there was nothing he enjoyed so much as to argue the issues of the day on the public platform. Politics! They were his delight, his life.

Most of the editorials of *The Ebytown Announcer* were the products of Levi's fertile brain. Here he practised that powerful political weapon known as invective. Sir John, the leader of the Conservative party, was the chief object of his denunciations. He and his whole nefarious crowd must be exterminated, or Canada would be utterly ruined in her infancy. If the Conservatives got into power, the country would go from bad to worse. Every day it would be plunged deeper and deeper into debt. The proposed railway to the Maritimes would be the last straw. The Tories had always been too lavish with the people's money.

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Fifty thousand dollars a year was too much for a Governor-General who spent his time moose-hunting with the Bluenoses. It was nothing short of outrageous. The ills of Canada were multiplying rapidly, manufacturing was hopelessly imperilled, agriculture suffered for want of reciprocity, commerce was everywhere stagnant. The people were flocking by hundreds to the States. Sir John was a traitor. Ship him and his hangers-on to Van Dieman's Land, and a good riddance. The Liberal party, and the Liberal party alone, could save Canada in her infancy from plunging headlong over the brink of national annihilation.

The good people of the county had every confidence in *The Ebytown Announcer* and a predilection towards Liberalism. They elected Levi to the coveted seat by a handsome majority. It became his duty to keep Sir John and his followers in their places. He must have shown some aptitude for the task, for his faithful constituency elected him as their representative for many successive years.

Meanwhile, the insurance company in which Levi was interested evolved out of its rather nebulous state into actual being. The five hundred policy holders had been signed up, and a Dominion charter had been obtained. With Levi Gingerich as its capable manager, the company was looking forward confidently to a development commensurate with the growth of the young nation. Its assets would increase, it was hoped, with Canada's prosperity.

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There was one episode in the early history of the new company, which Levi told over and over again with much appreciation. It had to do with Samuel Bricker, an old man with a flowing white beard and a face seamed with the cares of many years. He it was who in the very dawn of the century had trekked his way through untravelled wildernesses to the Canadian border, had paddled across the turbulent Niagara in the box of his conestoga wagon, and had then groped his way through the Beverley Swamp to the Heasley Tract. This was the man who had been entrusted with twenty thousand silver dollars to convey from Pennsylvania to Canada. More than anyone else he was responsible for the Mennonite settlement in the heart of Upper Canada. There was none in all Ebytown but had heard the almost incredible story of Sam Bricker's many adventures and escapades.

It was this same Sam Bricker who came one day and knocked on Levi's desk with his heavy cane. He wanted to take out some life insurance, he said.

Levi gasped.

The historic old gentleman rapped again more imperiously than ever. "Don't you hear good?" he said. "I feel to take some of your life insurance, or what you call it. Life insurance!"

Levi wanted to laugh, but for his life he dared not. "How old are you?" he asked. He had long since learned to elicit this most necessary information in an apologetic tone of voice.

"Ninety-four."

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Levi was nearly convulsed with internal laughter, but he restrained himself sufficiently to remark, "You're a little old, Mr. Bricker."

"How old am I? Ninety-four, I told you."

"I say, you are too old."

"Then why don't you speak out? I don't hear as good as I used to. So you don't want to give me my life insurance?"

"I'm afraid it's too much of a risk," said Levi. "Too much of a risk, I say."

"A risk? Is that what you said?" The old man began to sputter about impatiently.

"Yes, a risk," confirmed Levi. "I'm sorry, but I can't."

"Well, if you can't you couldn't," said Old Sam Bricker. "But where's the risk? I'm sure there's not many dies at ninety-four."

"Not many," Levi was forced to admit.

The old man picked up his cane and prepared to go. "People don't know what risks are these days," he said. "They want everything made easy."

"Let me help you down the stairs," offered Levi, opening the door.

Sam Bricker flung at him a look of withering scorn. "Your help I don't need," he said. "I'll take the risk."

There was nothing for Levi to do but to stand impotently at the top of the stairs and watch.

The descent was slow, but steady. On every step the old man halted, thumped with his cane, and mut-

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tered, "Risks." But when he reached the street, he chuckled, shook his cane at Levi, and called out at the top of his voice, "You can keep your life insurance. Do you hear? Risks! You don't know yet what they are."

The men on the street that morning wondered when they saw Old Sam Bricker hobbling along fairly convulsed with unadulterated glee.

CHAPTER XV

The Call of the West

NO one was more surprised than Manassah himself upon receipt of a letter from Ottawa requesting his immediate presence at the Parliament Buildings there to discuss with officials of the Government a matter of agricultural import. That was in April of 1872, a very busy season for Manassah, with four farms to plough and a number of budding industrial interests in the town on his hands; but he packed his satchel forthwith and was off on the evening train.

It was a week before he returned, and when he did, he had a surprise for his family. In November he was to have an extended trip to Manitoba.

"To Manitoba!" cried his dismayed wife. "Where's that?"

"One of the new provinces out west," Manassah told her.

"Is it far?"

"Fourteen hundred miles, or thereabouts," said Manassah.

Hannah gasped. "You'll never come back," she wailed. She swallowed a great lump in her throat and added one brief but significant word, "alive".

Noah, the bishop, was reconciled only when he

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learned what lay back of this mad venture of Manassah's into the wilds of western Canada.

It had to do, it seemed, with a great Mennonite emigration from the south of Russia. On the shores of the Black Sea near the scene of the great Crimean War, there lived, so Manassah had learned, a persecuted, expatriated people, who yearned for the freedom of the western world. The British Consul to Russia had suggested to them the tractless plains of Canada, but others dreamed of Kansas and Nebraska, mere names, all of them, but synonyms of peace and prosperity. They were all ready to go, awaiting only instructions from their leaders.

There were those who urged the Canadian government to immediate action. They knew these people, had visited them in Russia during their years of disquietude. A finer race of agriculturalists could not be found, they declared, to break the virgin soil of the west and to people Manitoba and the regions beyond.

"They will be good farmers," said Manassah. "They're Mennonites."

"Mennonites!" exclaimed Esther. She was under the impression that the Mennonites came from Pennsylvania.

"They come from there here," Noah explained, "but back of that they lived in Switzerland, and Germany, and North Italy, and in the Netherlands. It's all in *The Martyrs' Mirror*." He waved his hand towards the solemn row of books on the shelf. "Them

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were the days they had to suffer with their religion. And now, 'tseems, it's Russia."

Manassah knew the whole story of the Mennonite persecutions in greater detail than it was recorded in the religious classic of the plain people. He could trace their history through many centuries in many lands. When the dark days of religious oppression broke over Middle Europe in the seventeenth century their own ancestors had fled to Pennsylvania, as everybody knew. But in that same dispersion Menno Simons, the founder of the Mennonite faith, had led many of his followers, Hollanders, for the most part, into Prussia, and there they had taken up land and settled. They did not mingle with the Prussians, remembering always that they were Mennonites, a people separate. For more than a century they lived in their own isolated communities, built their own homes and churches, enjoyed by the courtesy of the government of the day the free exercise of their religion, exemption from taxation, immunity from the courts of law and from the heathenish practice of war. Then Prussia became embroiled in international difficulties and made a sudden demand on the Mennonites for military service. This was met by an indignant refusal, and as a result, the Mennonites were deprived of their citizenship, fined and imprisoned on little or no pretext at all, tormented, execrated. There was no living any longer in the same country with the warlords of Prussia.

And then, in their hour of need, a way had been

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providentially opened for their escape. It happened that Russia had recently acquired territory along the shores of the Black Sea and needed trained agriculturalists to occupy and till the land. The Empress, Catherine the Second, hearing of the plight of the Mennonites, sent her agents to them with a munificent offer. If they would go in a body to colonize these lands of hers, she would be pleased to grant them entire and absolute religious liberty, the right to erect and control their own churches and religious schools, provided no attempts were made to proselytize. She would allow them, too, exemption from taxation covering a period of years and the privilege of formulating their own municipal and community laws under their own officers. Military protection was to be theirs without military service. All that they had ever enjoyed in Prussia in their palmy days Catherine held out to them, and more. Then, as if to attest her generosity, she included among her favours free transportation to Southern Russia and exemption from duty on the goods they should bring with them.

It was a diplomatic stroke on the part of the great Catherine, and a veritable godsend to the distressed people. By hundreds and thousands they poured into the fertile plains that had so lately fallen to Russia, and devoted themselves assiduously to agriculture and manufacturing. A century passed prosperously and peaceably by. Then once more the war-clouds gathered to wreck their happiness. In 1870 a ukase was issued demanding of the Mennonites in

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Russia that anathema of anathemas, military service. Consternation reigned. Deputations to St. Petersburg to plead their case proved hopelessly futile. Many privileges long enjoyed were summarily discontinued. The Russian language was required to be taught in their schools. All feeling of security was gone. Siberia was threatened, if resistance was shown. The people began to gather up their belongings and cast about for pastures new. One of their leaders, Bernard Warkentin by name, was acting upon the suggestion of the British Consul. He was on his way to Canada. Manassah had been commissioned to meet him on his arrival, and together they were to explore the Red River district with a view to finding there suitable lands for a possible Mennonite settlement.

Manassah set himself at once to find out all he could about the West in general and about Manitoba in particular. The information he was able to accumulate was pitifully meagre. For two hundred years there had been no history save the records of the Hudson's Bay Company, no population to speak of but trappers, half-breeds and full-blooded redskins. Every man who valued his life in that benighted country, he was told, must be able to defend himself with his own weapon; if he was worsted in the conflict, the wild beasts would soon know his last resting-place.

Bernard Warkentin arrived in safety from across the water, and Manassah met him in Toronto. That was in November, when winter multiplied the terrors

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of life in the western wilds. The two Mennonite explorers, however, set out on their perilous tour, unarmed yet unafraid. Their route had been mapped out for them, through Detroit, Chicago, Duluth and Pembina. Winnipeg was their destination. Traveling by train Manassah discovered to be a most indolent occupation, calculated, strangely enough, to produce the maximum of fatigue. He welcomed the stage coach which met them at the end of the rails, and yet long before the coach and four had bumped their way to their destination he was not sure but it might have been pleasanter to walk. Bernard at his side said nothing. He had journeyed from Russia and was less impatient with the discomforts of travel.

It was night when they reached Winnipeg. Fortunately, there was a room to be had at the hotel. The men were tired, sleepy, and cold. They had tumbled into bed before they realized that the lines had not fallen to them in pleasant places. There was only one quilt, and it was very narrow and quite too thin for a chill November night. There were other disturbing factors, too, belonging to the insect world, and with these the Mennonites had their first, and they hoped, their last experience.

The day dawned bright and fair. There had been a light fall of snow during the night, so that Winnipeg was dressed in purest white to greet her guests. The little town was delightful, it must be confessed. Through an avenue of shrubs the beautiful Red River wound its tortuous way to the north. On this side

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were three churches of Protestant faiths, and yonder the great steeple of St. Boniface held aloft a cross of shimmering gold. To the south lay Fort Garry and the government buildings, not yet completed. The sky was a cloudless blue; there was a tang in the air. Young men walked about here and there fairly exuding optimism. On every hand the Mennonites were greeted with cordiality. When the first hour was over, they were strangers no longer. They had felt the intangible yet unmistakable welcome of the West.

After dinner Manassah went to pay his hotel bill. He and Bernard would be leaving that afternoon, he explained, having found the official who was to pilot them through the region the government proposed to bestow upon the Mennonites.

The proprietor turned up his book and named his fee. "Eight dollars."

"Eight dollars," gasped Manassah. "That can't be right. Only last night we came already."

"We gave you supper out of hours and two meals to-day, besides your bed," was the uncompromising reply.

Manassah pulled out his wallet and produced the money. But he could not refrain from a little sally tinged with sarcasm. "If you come some time to Ebytown," he said, "ask once for Manassah Horst. By him you can have all you can eat, and a bed you can sleep in, and there's nothing to pay."

The proprietor picked up the money and put it in his strong box. He watched the Mennonites with

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much amusement until they were out of the building. Two more oddities to be incorporated into his fund of tales of the trails.

The Mennonites spent the winter in the vicinity of Winnipeg, exploring and investigating. Having looked over the land which the government was willing to cede, they chose the level prairie stretches along the international border. There were twenty-three townships in all, of which fifteen formed a strip thirty-six miles long and from six to eighteen miles wide, comprising seven hundred and twenty square miles, or four hundred and sixty thousand, eight hundred acres; the remaining eight townships were on the other side of the river. These lands Manassah and Bernard agreed could be converted into the most productive wheat fields in North America, bar none.

By May, the delegates were ready to go to Ottawa to present their report. Having caught something of the western spirit of adventure, they decided to make the journey by the all-Canadian route. It would be a novel, and perhaps a valuable experience, though they were warned that they would find it rough and wearisome.

And so, indeed, it proved to be. Five hundred miles lay between Winnipeg and Thunder Bay on the Superior, five hundred miles of wilderness. There was no railroad. For miles at a stretch only a well-blazed trail pointed the way. Rocks and bogs abounded everywhere. The height of land which separates the valley of the Red River from the water-

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ways of the mighty St. Lawrence had to be surmounted. Fortunately, there was a chain of inland lakes, well equipped with boats and boatmen, and these did much to relieve the monotony of the tiresome journey, and to make the travellers forget the discomforts of the many portages. The last forty-five miles were covered in a cumbersome and rickety omnibus, drawn by two teams of indifferent horses. The outfit did not look at all promising, but it brought them at last in safety to Arthur's Landing on the blue Superior.

Arthur's Landing, which was soon to become the metropolis of the Thunder Bay region, was at that time just beginning to emerge. By actual count, there were no more than forty residences, temporary shacks, for the most part, thrown together to house a corps of railway engineers and various other officials. Saloons everywhere.

The Mennonites were interested principally in the shed which had been erected for the accommodation of trappers and prospective immigrants. They entered it to find a family of foreigners of some unknown race and tongue, a strong man with a delicate wife and five young children. They were going on, on, they motioned, their faces lit up with eagerness and hope. Manassah's heart warmed to them. What did they expect to find out yonder in the west, he wondered. What did the future hold for them? He slipped his hand into his pocket and drew out his purse. Into each childish palm he put a shining penny, and clasping the hands of the parents, he expressed his good

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wishes. Full well he knew that while they could not understand a word he spoke, the human heart everywhere comprehends the universal language of love. And so, like ships that pass in the night, they passed on the broad sea of life, never to meet again.

The steamer *Algoma* left the Landing that night for Collingwood on the Georgian Bay. It lay at anchor out in the deep, and a huge scow took the Mennonites, bag and baggage, to board it. Four happy days they spent on the water, skirting all the while the dark wooded shores of Ontario. Never did the sky seem so blue, nor the trees so green, nor the air so balmy. They were beginning to realize, but dimly, the extent, the beauty and the great potential wealth of this Canada, this child among the nations.

The travellers reached Ottawa, at length, eighteen days after they had set out from Winnipeg. They were met by government officials, who greeted them kindly and listened to their report with much interest. The matter was settled expeditiously, and amicably, too. Canada needed immigrants, and could afford to treat them generously. Bernard Warkentin and his Mennonites were to have the desired twenty-three townships, and all the usual requirements for homesteading were to be set aside in this particular case. They were to be allowed to settle in villages, as had been their custom in Russia, and the Canadian government gave its solemn guarantee that these people were to be accorded, ever and always, complete exemption from military service, entire religious liberty, the right

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to control their own schools and to make declarations by simple affirmation. So, all the tenets of their old-world faith were to be observed and safeguarded in the new world of promise. They were to begin life all over again with every desire of their hearts fully met.

But between the prospective recipients of these manifold favours and the fulfilment of their happy dreams, the broad Atlantic rolled. Yonder, on foreign and unfriendly shores, a discomfited, distressed people waited and prayed. Would Bernard Warkentin come again, and if he did, what message would he bring? Would he find some way of transporting them to that far-off, new-born nation in which their every hope was centred?

Calculations were being made at Ottawa. There were six thousand people on that distant shore. It would cost seventy-five thousand dollars to transport them to Manitoba and to provide for them the necessary implements of agriculture.

Bernard Warkentin looked blankly about him. Seventy-five thousand dollars! "We would pay it back when we can," he said weakly.

"Have you no money? No friends?"

"We have nothing," said Bernard, "nothing but what we carried away."

Seventy-five thousand dollars! Where was it to come from?

Manassah had anticipated the difficulty. For weeks he had been turning the matter over in his mind. "We

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could raise it," he spoke up. "Us at Ebytown, I mean."

"We would pay it back when we can," reaffirmed Bernard, with increasing hope.

The agreement was drawn up and signed. In the name of the Mennonites at Ebytown Manassah promised to make good the money which the government should advance on behalf of the Russian Mennonites. Manassah would hold himself personally responsible for it. Bernard Warkentin set out joyfully to bear the good news to his people.

But when Manassah returned to Ebytown after an absence of many months, he was confronted with an unforeseen difficulty. The revival, it turned out, had not been an unmixed blessing. Hearts that had been stirred with holy thoughts to high endeavour were disturbed now about mere ecclesiastical forms. The spirit of contention was abroad. There was a division among the people. Simeon Ernst, together with other leaders and a great following, had been expelled. They called themselves New Mennonites now, and already they were laying plans to build a new meeting-house where they might have a Sunday-school, evening services and, please God, a perpetual revival. The Old Mennonites, as they came to be called, continued to worship with dignity and restraint, after the manner of their fathers. Manassah wondered which of the two factions he should approach with his seventy-five thousand dollar proposition.

"Both," Levi told him. "Tell them what a won-

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derful country Manitoba is. Cold, yes, but you don't feel it. With cultivation, it will produce wheat a hundred-fold. Tell them these Mennonites know how to farm. They farmed last century in Russia and the century before in Prussia. They'll make a garden of Manitoba. In twenty-five years they will pay back the seventy-five thousand dollars with good interest. Don't forget the interest, Manassah. Make it high."

It sounded so much like a worldly speculation that Manassah shook his head.

"Tell them it's their religious duty," continued Levi. "Ask them did they forget already how Sam Bricker fetched twenty thousand dollars over from Pennsylvania in the "weggli" to buy the Heasley Tract for us. Rub that in good, Manassah. Fetch out the old "weggli." It's down there on the farm rusting to pieces."

"If Sam Bricker could go around with me."

Levi laughed. That reminded him of his life insurance story. "If he could, he'd shake his cane at them and tell them they don't know yet what risks are."

"Neither we do, these days," said Manassah.

The subscription list was prepared, headed by Manassah's contribution of five thousand dollars and a like amount from Levi Gingerich. It was off to a good start.

"Remember you can do a lot with hand-shaking, Manassah," said Levi, "and don't forget to ask what's the new baby's name."

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Manassah followed the politician's advice as well as he could. He shook hands one day with Old One Per Cent Bomberger, and got himself invited into the charmed circle that surrounded the box stove in the store.

"This Manitoba," said Old One Per Cent, "what for a country is it anyway?"

"A good place for storekeepers," returned Manassah. "How much is butter now?"

"At fifteen cents a pound we sell it."

Manassah shrugged his shoulders. "There it's all the way from forty to sixty cents," he said, "according to quality."

"Whew!" whistled one of the arm-chair philosophers. "You could make more than one per cent. there."

"And eggs?" inquired the storekeeper, overlooking this blatant reference to his cupidity.

"Everything is double there to what it is here," said Manassah. He told of the exorbitant rates and the poor accommodation at the hotel. He related how on a very cold day he had put the horse he was driving into the hotel stables, and for two hours and a little hay, they had demanded fifty cents.

"Fifty cents!"

"The next day we let him stand out under the blue heavens," added Manassah. "We had some place else to put our fifty cents."

It was not Manassah but Old One Per Cent who introduced the subject of the agricultural possibilities

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of the new province. As far as he had been able to gather, it seemed to be nothing but a run for wild animals and a happy hunting-ground for Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company.

Manassah insisted that he was wrong. It was a land of boundless possibilities. It was ploughshares Manitoba needed, not spears. In a few years it would be exporting grain instead of pelts. Already towns were emerging from the wilderness. Winnipeg was on the eve of a great development.

"Devil-up-ment," sniffed an incredulous one. "They fed you up, Manassah, with their big talk, them westerners."

"What do we owe them Russians that we have to fetch them out to Canada?" said Old One Per Cent. "What did they ever do for us, eh?"

"It's not the Russians we want to help," replied Manassah.

"Not the Russians? Who, then?"

"The Mennonites," said Manassah. "It's the Russians that are persecuting them."

Prejudice dies hard. "Anyways they come from Russia," argued Old One Per Cent. "They're different to us." Bomberger always included himself among the adherents to the faith from which he had inherited all the religion he had lost.

"Yes, they're different," Manassah was compelled to concede. And yet, why shouldn't they be? Was it to be expected that a people who had lived in Prussia and Russia since the great dispersion of the Mennon-

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ites should be identical with themselves who had dwelt for two centuries, barring a few years, beneath the British flag? "We got a lot from the English in Pennsylvania," he said.

"What did we get?" came the challenge.

"Bonnets, for one thing," replied Manassah. "We got them from the Quakers." Bernard had told him that the Mennonites in Russia would think bonnets exceedingly worldly. "It only goes to show how easy it is to throw with them you live with," he said. This was a well-known axiom among the Mennonites, the reason back of their ancient practice of exclusion.

"We'd better let them Russians stop where they are," said Old One Per Cent. "We don't want to get like them."

The very air was surcharged with bigotry and prejudice. These prospective immigrants of Manassah's were Russians, not Mennonites; foreigners, not future fellow-citizens of Canada. It was abundantly evident that the seventy-five thousand dollars wasn't going to be raised around the box-stove in Old One Per Cent's store.

In other quarters, however, Manassah met with greater success. The task he had set himself was by no means an easy one, but in little more than a month he saw his great dream fulfilled. The seventy-five thousand dollars had been over-subscribed, and the first instalment of the money was already on its way to Ottawa.

For many years Manassah lived a busy life in the

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cause he had espoused. Only intermittently, between trips to the great outside world, was he to be found in the quiet of his home at Ebytown. He was off to Nebraska to investigate lands that were being offered to the Mennonites in that state, then on to Kansas to verify reports of the prevalence of grasshoppers there. He spent months between New York and Montreal haggling with the steamship companies about transportation rates. He bought lumber at rock-bottom prices, took it out to Manitoba and personally superintended the erection of the necessary immigration sheds. He negotiated for ploughs by the carload and for food by the ton. Always, everywhere, he was thinking about his charges and their interests.

In March, word came that the advance guard of five hundred Mennonite families had arrived by the Allan Steamship Line. Manassah was to meet them in Toronto and to conduct them from there to the end of their long journey.

They were huddled together, like a flock of lost sheep, when Manassah found them, but they showed no evidences of destitution. They were all well-clothed, many of them in furs, and they carried with them bundles of unused apparel. Their faces betrayed anxiety mixed with hope. In their pockets the men carried their gold. They were glad to hand it over to Manassah for safe keeping. From the first they trusted him implicitly. He was their Russian Father, they said, their Moses, who would lead them safely

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through the wilderness into that distant land of promise.

To his amazement, Manassah learned that the Government at Ottawa proposed to send these people to Manitoba by way of Prince Arthur's Landing and the lake and river route to Winnipeg. But Manassah knew that road and its discomforts. He went at once to the government agent in Toronto and protested that while the route might be feasible for trappers and hunters and Canadian voyageurs, it would be disastrous to send a party of inexperienced Europeans that way. Did he realize, Manassah asked him, that it was a journey of twelve days, at the shortest?

"I know nothing about it," said the agent, loftily. "I'm only obeying orders."

"From Ottawa?"

"Yes."

"But they'll starve."

"Let them. What do we want with people like them in Canada, anyway?"

Manassah took it upon himself to wire his protest to the superior officer at the capital. He was anxious until he received the answer, "Do as you see fit."

The party travelled the safer route through the States by rail, and presently out on the boundless prairies of the Canadian West squatted these pioneers of a new day of peace and agriculture.

This was but the beginning of a great tide of immigration into Manitoba, as well as into Kansas, Nebraska and Dakota. Every ship, it seemed, had its

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quota of Russian Mennonites. Some landed at New York, others at Montreal. Manassah met as many as he could and offered his help. He induced many to spend the winter in the vicinity of Ebytown, that they might learn western methods of agriculture. In the spring they would be going on—but where? They turned to Manassah for advice.

“I have been to Kansas, Nebraska, and Dakota,” was Manassah’s invariable answer. “It seems to me Manitoba is better than them all.” Then he would smile and add significantly, “It’s in Canada.”

There came days of great financial stringency. The government was slow in advancing the money, and the subscribers at Ebytown were often tardy with their payments. But the work never stopped. Manassah drew large drafts on his own security at the local bank. Once it was six thousand dollars to buy ploughs, and again twelve thousand with which to purchase wagons. There was no telling how much there might be in the ubiquitous black bag Manassah carried. Sometimes, too, there was little enough. On one occasion when a newly arrived party had delivered to him their gold, it contained ten thousand dollars over night. Never was there any attempt at theft, not even among the half-breeds of the wild and woolly west. “It’s because I carry no weapons,” said Manassah. “My helplessness is my defence.” And so, indeed, it seemed, for he walked unscathed in the midst of many dangers.

Great, too, was the physical endurance that Man-

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assah was called upon to bear. Night after night anxiety robbed him of his sleep; day after day he tramped about in soggy boots, and yet no twinge of rheumatism did he feel. "The Lord knows what He wants me to do," he said. "He will take care of me till it's done."

So year by year, Manassah toiled, and sacrificed and endured. The more he gave of himself, the more he wanted to give. All the while his optimism for the Canadian West was growing apace. Some day it would be the granary of the world, he predicted. The time was coming when Canadian wheat would be shipped not only across the Atlantic to Europe but by way of the Pacific to Asia. Canada had a future beyond the most sanguine hopes of its politicians. It was destined to be some day the greatest nation of the world. That was his vision.

There were those who ridiculed this glowing optimism, but the immigration officer at Ottawa seized the opportunity of using it to good account. He commissioned Manassah to write a pamphlet extolling the agricultural possibilities of Manitoba and the regions farther west. This he had translated into many languages and distributed in great quantities throughout the over-crowded nations of distressed Europe. So it came about that Manassah Horst, whose conscience would not allow him to be the chief magistrate of Ebytown, became to the great, unknown world a flaming apostle of Canada and the Canadian West.

There were those in Ebytown who had little pa-

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tience with Manassah and his escapades. His father, the old bishop, for example, worried himself sick about the pamphlet and Manassah's connection with it. He had visions of people flocking by thousands into the trap that Manassah had set for them. If they didn't freeze, they were sure to starve, he declared. Manassah would have a lot to answer for.

Simeon Ernst, too, felt constrained to offer his denunciation. "Where's Manassah?" he asked Hannah one day, knowing full well what answer to expect.

"He's in the west."

Simeon smiled sarcastically. "When he comes home again," he said, "tell him I give him back the advice he gave me once. Let him stop to home and mind his own business."

Manassah made twenty-seven trips in all to Manitoba before the Mennonite emigration from Russia was fully settled in little villages on the prairies of Manitoba. Then, and then only, did he return satisfied to his home at Ebytown.

"And what did you get, Manassah, for all your work?" said Old One Per Cent, when he met him one day in front of the store.

"Did you get a hundred dollars, even?" Gideon piped up from the doorway.

Manassah did not answer.

"A few gray hairs and a bald spot on the top of your head," continued the father. "That's all that I can see."

Manassah held his abused head aloft, squared his

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shoulders and said, "You won't mebbe understand, because it's not your kind of pay; but I tell you I got what is more worth than all the gold in Canada."

"You did? What was it, then?"

"The consciousness of having done my duty, the joy of having served my country and the satisfaction of having helped my fellowmen. It's a fine day, Gideon. It looks for more rain, don't it, Silas?"

CHAPTER XVI

The Call of the East

THERE was unprecedented excitement at the Horsts' upon receipt of a letter from Ephraim announcing that the great ambition of his life was about to be realized. He was coming home, but only to say good-bye. By August he was due in San Francisco, and then, if the Pacific did not belie its name, heigho for Japan.

"We didn't get much out of Ephraim," said Noah from his arm-chair.

"He never was no good to start with," contributed Sarah from hers. "He never would work."

"But he thinks and studies." This, rather reproachfully, from Esther.

The old people had no patience with Ephraim's mental labour. If he must think, couldn't he think in Ebytown? Why must he take that precious workshop of his all over the world? Wasn't it enough that he had been to England, and France, and Germany, and "wherever else he was", without running off now to Japan?

Esther had an answer but she did not speak it.

"If only he'd get married like every man owes it to his wife to do," said Noah. "This way, with all his running around, he gets nowhere."

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Esther sat in silence with the letter in her lap. Presently she picked it up to return it to its envelope, and in so doing her eyes fell upon a postscript on the back page. "Married! Nellie Jackson in England," it read. "Will bring her along. She wants to see you all."

Esther gasped. "Why he is!" she cried excitedly. "He's married already."

"Huh?"

"I say he's married." She read the message aloud.

"Her!" ejaculated Sarah.

"Couldn't he get nobody else?" said Noah. He had heard of this Nellie Jackson before. She was of the world, worldly. Her father was a professor at the college which Ephraim had attended, and Nellie had been running all over Europe with him year after year, pursuing Ephraim, Noah verily believed. But, be that as it might, she was an outlander. Her ancestors had never seen Pennsylvania.

Esther dared not say how delighted she was with the news. In her lonesome heart there welled up a great joy. She longed to take Nellie Jackson with all her worldliness to her heart at that very moment. If only they were coming to stay in Ebbytown, she and Ephraim. . .

"Esther!"

"Yes, mom."

"The pillow's slipped. It ketches me so in the back."

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Esther made the necessary adjustment. "Is that better?"

"Ach, it will do," replied Sarah. "I've got it so hard."

"Yes, mom, I know."

They were coming, it seemed, on the very heels of the letter. With characteristic masculine thoughtlessness, Ephraim had allowed the home people no time for elaborate preparations. The floors were clean enough to eat off, but by all rules of housewifery handed down through many maternal generations, they ought to be scrubbed again in anticipation of company, and the windows hadn't been cleaned for three days. But Esther was resigned enough about it. "If we can't do it, we couldn't," she said. "They will chust have to take us like they find us."

"You have no baking for strangers," Sarah reminded her.

"Strangers!" There were volumes of reproach in the daughter's voice.

"Strangers," repeated Sarah. "Her we don't know yet, nor her folks even."

"And it's fifteen years that we didn't see Ephraim yet," added Noah, in justification of Sarah's use of the epithet. "Folks that are in the world can change a lot in fifteen years."

Manassah hitched up to go to the station to meet the company. Presently he was back again with his two passengers. They were chatting and laughing in a manner that Sarah judged quite unbecoming in young

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people who had dedicated their lives to the service of the Lord.

"That's the picket fence I told you about, Nellie," Ephraim was saying. "I'm so glad it is still white, Manassah. But what have you done to the house?"

"The house? Why, nothing."

"It's shrunk."

Manassah smiled appreciatively. He remembered how different the old place had looked after an absence of less than a year in Manitoba.

"Oh, the lovely maples," cried a soft female voice, "and the chestnuts all in bloom. I love the old place already." She had such a sweet, refined accent, Esther thought, like the tinkling of a distant dinner-bell.

Manassah jumped out of the democrat and lifted out the foreign-looking baggage, leaving Ephraim to help his new wife and her hoops over the wheel. Esther came running out to meet them. She threw her arms around Nellie, called her sister and kissed her effusively. Ephraim crept up behind, enveloped sister and wife to capacity in his arms and smacked them both. He didn't know which tasted the sweeter, he avowed.

"Ephy," gurgled Nellie, in gentle reproof. "You've mussed my hair, and you know how much I want them to like me."

"They couldn't help it even if you wore a wig," answered the enraptured husband.

"We do already," cried Esther, earnestly. "We love you. And it's so good to have you back, Ephraim."

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"It's the first time you have so much as looked at me," laughed Ephraim, pinching Esther's cheek. "Where's all the colour gone?"

"With the years," replied Esther, suppressing a sigh.

On the stoop stood Hannah in her plain Mennonite dress and white muslin cap, a sister-in-law of a different type. She kissed Nellie very mechanically, but shook Ephraim's hand cordially enough. The children pattered up one by one in their bare feet to give their bashful welcomes. Yonder in the doorway of the "doddy-house" stood Noah, waiting with indecision, and trying to force himself, it would seem, to be civilly cordial in his welcome of this Jackson girl who had succeeded in thrusting herself and all her worldliness into his family circle.

"I know who this is," this new daughter-in-law of his was saying. She was advancing towards him with outstretched hand. "It's Grossdoddy Horst."

Noah made a mental note of the "Grossdoddy". That was an agreeable surprise. Nellie Jackson had, after all, he concluded, a very pleasant way with her.

"Ephy tells me you have only one fault," Nellie went on to say.

"Only one fault," said Ephraim, as he shook his father's hand.

"And what might that be?" Was it possible that Noah thought Ephraim had found one too many?

Nellie was laughing now. "He says you were too

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easy with him," she announced. "That's what makes it so hard for me."

"With them all I was too easy," replied Noah, with a sigh. "They ran all away from me and the meeting."

"They'll all be with you up in heaven," Nellie tried to assure him. "And you'll have me there, too, I hope. Where's Grossmommy?"

Noah led her to Sarah's invalid chair. "Here she is, Sarai," he said. "Here's Ephraim's missus."

Nellie turned to cast at her husband a look of infinite amusement.

"She can't talk like she used to, with the palsy," explained Noah.

"But she hears good," added Esther.

"Then we shall have to do the talking, shan't we, Ephy? Grossmommy and I are going to be friends. I'm going to talk to you, Grossmommy, and cook for you, and Ephy's going to read to you. We're going to have a lovely week, and Esther's going to have a rest."

Noah made two more mental notes, "shall" and "Ephy."

"Ephy's just like all the other great men," said Nellie. "He says he owes all he is to his mother. He's very clever is our Ephy, and such a good preacher."

"Hush, Nellie," the proud husband was protesting. "She knew me before you did. She knows me better, too."

"He never was no good," said Sarah, with asperity. But she let Ephraim hold her palsied hand.

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"Esther!"

"Yes, mom."

"I feel for a drink."

Esther brought a cup of water and held it for her while she drank. She bent over to catch the unintelligible words her mother was trying to articulate.

"What does she say, Esther?"

"She says Cyrus was the smartest of us all," was the interpretation.

"So he was," declared Ephraim. "Poor Cyrus!"

In less than an hour Ephraim was down at Levi's office. "Hello, Levi," he called out, jovially. "How's the Latin?"

"Ephraim!"

"Yes. She's out at the farm, Nellic, my wife, you know."

"So you're married!"

"Yes, why aren't you?"

"There was bitterness in Levi's answer. "She won't have me," he said.

"Who won't have you? Esther?"

"No, her mother."

"I call it a shame," said Ephraim. "Of course Esther couldn't leave her now, but why must she be sacrificed, while all the rest of us go free? Is it only Esther's duty?" He related how Sarah had decreed at Greenbush in the long ago that Esther was to be the necessary old maid. "It doesn't seem fair," he added.

"Life is a riddle," said Levi. "The more you tangle yourself out the more your tangle yourself in."

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Nellie was succeeding very well in ingratiating herself with the invalid Sarah. She chatted gaily about her experiences in the great world. She knew such wonderful stories, had met such famous people and had read books the Horsts had not so much as heard about. Sarah was entranced in spite of herself. Every morning she went off flitting over the continent with Nellie, looking at life through a different pair of spectacles. She forgot her poor, helpless, emaciated self, which was, of course, what Nellie had set out to make her do.

But sometimes it happened that when Nellie thought that she had Sarah with her in London, or in Paris, or in Berlin, she suddenly realized that her charge had wandered away alone to New York. Had Nellie ever seen such high buildings? Had she ever been to Coney Island?

"I have never seen New York," Nellie would reply.

"Two years he lived there," Sarah would say. "Cyrus, my bubbly-boy." She conjured up the meagre bits of information she had gleaned from Manassah and Levi and she tried in her feeble way to pass them on the Nellie. But she couldn't think of the name of the street he was on when the train. . .

"Never mind," said Nellie. "Some day it will come to you. Perhaps you would like a little nap now."

"Ach, so," murmured Sarah, and soon she had forgotten her sorrows in peaceful sleep.

Esther was full of admiration for Nellie, and de-

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terminated that she should know it. "Your life is so full," she said, one day, as they sat together beside the invalid chair. "What haven't you all seen and heard?"

Yes, Nellie had to acknowledge that she had had opportunities above the average.

"And you're not a bit stuck up with it all," said Esther. "You're common like we are."

Nellie's face lit up joyfully. "That is the greatest compliment I have had in months," she said. "Why, Esther, you didn't think my blood was blue, did you?"

"Not blue, exactly."

"If more had been given to me," said Nellie, "of me shall more be required. That's the way I look at life. Ephy has a little speech about a person who is wrapped up in himself making a very small parcel. Ephy is wonderful, Esther."

"Yes. Of them all I understand him best."

"And Levi, you understand him, too, don't you, Esther?"

"Yes, him, too. I wasn't counting him. He's not my brother."

Nellie smiled. "Of course not," she said. "Some day, perhaps, he'll be something more than a brother."

"No, Nellie, I couldn't. I mustn't drag him down."

"Why, Esther, what do you mean?"

"I'm not advanced in my mind like he is. The Latin Grammar was too hard for me."

Nellie acted upon a sudden resolution. "Don't be foolish, Esther," she said. "As Levi's wife, you will

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be a great lady some day. You must make him proud of you. When I go back to Toronto, I'll send you a box of books. Read them. They'll help. Some day, perhaps. . ."

Esther's face was suffused with blushes. "Some day, perhaps," she murmured, with averted face.

Every day when Ephraim returned from town he had to tell his wife about the old friends he had met. Nellie found them all very interesting.

"Who was it to-day, Ephy?" she called out the morning of their proposed departure for Toronto.

"Gideon Bomberger."

"Old One Per Cent's son?"

"Yes."

"Haven't you seen the old bookbinder yet? Schwartzentruber, or whatever his name is."

"I've been there twice," replied Ephraim. "Both times he was out for his beer. He stays longer now. But I went into the shop and sat on the bench where I used to sit. And I saw the stove, but not my Latin Grammar."

"I wish I could see that book about Japan," said Nellie.

"I wish I could myself."

"Another unfulfilled dream," said Nellie. "But tell me about Gideon."

"He's down in the mouth," said Ephraim. "The new store across the road is cutting their profits in two and stealing their trade into the bargain. And every year, he says, it is costing him more to live."

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"Better call him Half Per Cent," laughed Nellie.

"I rather incline to Two Per Cent," declared Ephraim. "He's twice as self-centred as his father. It's Rhoda, I suppose. I'm glad I haven't that kind of wife."

"It's because you're not that kind of husband," said Nellie. "Birds of a feather, you know, flock together."

"I haven't heard you mention Rhoda, Esther," said Ephraim. "Aren't you friends?"

Esther's heart thumped. "Friends?" she said. "I hope we're that, but we don't understand or enjoy each other now. Don't ask me any more, Ephraim. It hurts."

Nellie had an understanding heart. "We outgrow our friendships like our clothes," she said. "Didn't you tell me once, Ephy, that our characters are mirrored in our friends, those we make and those we forsake?"

The hour was approaching when Ephraim and Nellie were to set out for Toronto. It was hard to say good-bye. In one short week, Nellie had worked her way into the affections of her husband's family. They loved her now as their own. Noah was willing to concede that, deep-dyed Methodist though she was, her prospects of heaven were very good. Sarah had Esther hunt out the finest of her patch-work quilts, and these she presented to her daughter-in-law as an evidence of the admiration she could not bring herself to express in words. The old people realized that they

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were bidding a last farewell to a loved daughter as well as to their son in the flesh.

The last moment had come. Manassah was holding the reins. Ephraim and Nellie were in the back seat of the democrat. The last kiss had been exchanged, the last handshake over. Tears were standing in every eye.

"There's old Schwartzentruber," cried one of the children.

Schwartzentruber, and no mistake. He carried a huge parcel, which seemed to impede his progress. He was waving his cane frantically in the air, trying to attract attention.

"He wants to talk to me," concluded Ephraim.

The bookbinder approached the democrat and held up the parcel. "It's for you," he said, "and for her." He indicated Nellie with his thumb. "I thought I wanted to give youse something yet."

"This is Mr. Schwartzentruber, Nellie," said Ephraim, "the bookbinder, you know."

"Yes, I know," replied Nellie, extending her hand and smiling into the eyes of the corpulent German. "I know the book, too. The one about Japan, isn't it?"

Schwartzentruber administered a sounding whack on his well-rounded thigh. "She's a smart one," he cried, with a chuckle. "Smarter than you. If I'd 've had her in my shop I might 've got me a good bookbinder."

Nellie dug her elbow imperceptibly into Ephraim's ribs.

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"Three days I wasted getting that book," the old bookbinder went on, "and then if the leaves wasn't all loose. I had to make them tight. It was a lot of work. It's wet yet. Sit on it, so it don't warp."

"Sit on it yourself," said Manassah. "You'll do it more good. Climb up and drive along, or we'll be late for the train."

Old Schwartzentruber did as he was told. But no sooner had the wheels begun to revolve than he waved his cane to Esther in great excitement. "You can pay it to-morrow," he called out.

"How much is it?"

"A dollar, seeing as it's from you to them."

"I'll go down to-morrow and pay it."

"It's from Esther, then?" said Ephraim.

"From her and me," answered Schwartzentruber. "For a bick chob like that I should have two dollars."

Nellie was very polite. "You could have given us nothing that we should value more," she said.

Ephraim said nothing. He seemed to be thinking.

CHAPTER XVII

Greenbush Again

THE good Lord came at last and answered the prayer of Sarah's heart. He took her home.

It happened at the evening hour of family worship. Supper was over, the dishes still on the table. Father and daughter sat on either side of the invalid chair. At Sarah's request, Noah was reading the tragic story of Lot, how he separated from Abram, his uncle, and pitched his tent toward Sodom, that wicked city.

Never had the old man read the sacred book with such understanding. He knew how to sympathize, for Lot's plight was his. He, too, had married a woman of the plain. All his life he had been sounding a warning cry of coming destruction to sin-stopped ears and to hearts that mocked. Sons and sons-in-law he had had, who had gone the way of the world, heeding not the danger. He might, indeed, have been reading a chapter out of his own unhappy life. Escape! Ah, yes, if he could, but it was too late. Alas, it was forever too late.

The sick woman stirred. She uttered a little, startled cry that even Esther could not interpret. Her eyes were fixed and glassy.

"Mom! Mom!" cried the dutiful daughter. She

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held the palsied hands tighter, and tried to still the anxiety of her own throbbing heart. "I'm here, mom."

There was no answer, no glance of recognition. A nameless horror was written on that motionless face. The unseeing eyes stared on into vacancy.

In alarm, Noah dropped the good book and bent over the palsied form. "Sarai!" he cried. "Don't look back! Don't look, Sarai! Escape! Escape!"

"Is she going?" whispered Esther.

"She's went," said Noah. "She's safe."

Even as he spoke, the last spark of Sarah's life flickered and fled. No more palsy, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor any more pain. Sarah Horst was no longer in the flesh, nor subject to mortal ills. She had passed, mercifully, beyond the veil.

Esther would never have believed how much she would miss her. Her hands seemed empty now; her life, purposeless. She longed to hear again her mother's thin, plaintive voice calling her to some trivial service. Only Noah, her father, sat in the front room now, his head bowed under the weight of his eighty years.

"You won't let me alone, will you, Esther?" he said, one day.

"No, pop," Esther had answered. "You can look to me."

Noah smiled contentedly. "It don't go long now no more," he said. "Only a couple years yet."

Now Levi Gingerich, as it turned out, had a differ-

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ent idea of the future of Esther's life. He came one day to expound it to her through the medium of a sheaf of house plans. "Look them over, Esther," he said. "I'll come again to-morrow, and you can tell me which you like best. In the spring I'm going to build our house."

Esther pushed the plans from her. "I can't, Levi," she said. It sounded very cold and distant.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Then what can't you do?"

"I can't get married, Levi. I might as well tell you now."

"Why didn't you tell me a quarter of a century ago?"

"Levi!"

"I might have got somebody else."

"Levi!!" Esther burst suddenly into tears.

Levi was completely nonplussed at this. These women! Would he ever be able to fathom them? He twirled his hat on his finger for a few minutes, then went and stood behind Esther's chair. "What's it all about, little girl?" he said, kindly.

Esther wiped away her tears, turned, and looking up into the dear man's face, asked a very astounding and pertinent question, "Do you love me, Levi?"

Levi whistled. "Do I love you?"

Yes, that was what she wanted to know.

"Don't I act it?" said Levi. "Don't I show the symptoms? Are you blind, perhaps?"

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"You never tell me that you love me," said Esther.
"Only once you did, and then. . ."

"Well?"

"And then you shouldn't ought to have. That time in the spring-house, it was."

A light broke over Levi's face. Women were queer, yes, but he was beginning to understand. He caught the tear-stained Esther in his arms and held her as he had in that brief moment of youthful passion in the long ago. He kissed her on her cheeks, her neck, her mouth, and last of all on the very tip of her red and shiny nose. "I love you," he said between each osculation. "Every minute of every day and night I love you, from Monday till Sunday, every week of the month, and every month of the year. I never loved anybody else, and cross my heart I never will. I love you more than—more than elections. In a thousand years. . ."

Esther pushed the amorous fellow from her.
"You're laughing at me," she charged.

"Not at you, Esther."

"It sounds like it."

"But how could you? You, I love. I'm laughing at fate. To think how I always wiggle 'round it somehow. Always I get what I want, Esther, but I have to keep the corners of my mouth turned up." And having offered this explanation, he reaffirmed his love with an outburst of laughter and finished the embrace.

"You have such a way with you, Levi," said Esther, her face beaming with happiness.

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So this was love, this the love Esther craved! Women were such queer, incomprehensible creatures. And yet . . . There was a twinkle in Levi's eye. "Esther, when did you ever tell me that you love me?" he asked.

Esther glanced at him reproachfully. "You know I do, Levi," she said.

"That's not enough, it seems," he told her. "There must be a bold statement of the bald fact."

Esther found herself again in his arms. "I . . . I . . . I'll look at the plans, Levi," she said. "You can't start building soon enough, but a room for Pop you must have."

"The house is yours and his," was the reply. "All I want is the key, Esther, the key to your heart." This from the prosaic Levi, who claimed that he could not fathom women and their sentimental ways. Tut! Tut!

But when Levi came again on the morrow, he did not so much as ask about the plans. The house might wait, he said. They must be married at once.

"In two months I could get ready," Esther thought.

"I can't wait two weeks," said Levi.

Esther stared at him blankly.

"The ship sails two weeks from to-day."

The woman's eyes were large as saucers. "You're not going to marry me and run away," she said. "You're not going to Europe, Levi?"

"Yes. Government business."

"Then I'll be ready till you're back," said she. "Best wait."

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"You're going with me, Esther," said Levi. "I have to take you to mend my socks and sew on my buttons. If there's any time left, we'll see the old world together."

"Levi!"

"That is, if you love me."

Esther threw her arms around his neck, and made without reservation the confession he desired.

The following week Levi Gingerich and Esther Horst were married, and off they went to Europe carrying with them the good wishes of all Ebytown. "Make it good!" their friends cried, as the train was pulling out of the station. "Come safe home! The time will go long till you are here again. Ade!"

It had been arranged that Noah was to live at Manassah's during Esther's absence. But no sooner was the excitement of the wedding over than the old man began to be restless, lost, without her. He announced one day that he was going to Greenbush.

"For a wisit?" asked Manassah.

"No, for to live," replied Noah. "We didn't treat Ezra right. He would feel better if I would go and make it good."

Manassah knew that was only an excuse. "You want to get away from Ebytown," he challenged. "We are too worldly for you."

"Yes, that, too." Noah was bound to confess. "Only Ezra is a Mennonite yet, a real Mennonite, I mean. He didn't run with the world like the rest. It

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hurts me so, Manassah, that you had to go with Simeon and his foolishness."

Manassah was not disposed at the moment to discuss again the great religious controversy of the day. His chief concern was to dissuade Noah, if possible, from his folly. "You wouldn't like it in Greenbush," he prophesied.

Everybody told him the same thing, but the more determined were the protests, the more obdurate did Noah become. He was going to Greenbush, whether or no. He found an opportune time to hitch his bay mare to his top-buggy, and when nobody was looking, he sneaked away. When Manassah discovered his father's absence, he instituted a search, but he had to go all the way to Greenbush before he located the runaway.

"Yes, here he can stop," said Ezra. "We haven't got it so good like he had it in Ebytown, but to him it's home, I guess."

Noah was delighted with Ezra. That was precisely what he wanted to say to Manassah. It was home. There the birds sang never so sweetly, and the skies were never so blue. His happiest memories clustered around the old farm. It was home. They couldn't drag him back to Ebytown.

It was not long before Noah discovered, however, that the atmosphere of the old farmhouse had changed with its furniture. It scarcely seemed the same place. He had an uncomfortable feeling every time he entered the kitchen. If he succeeded in getting in without

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tracking mud on Salome's clean floor, he was sure to hang his hat on the wrong peg. He heard about it every time he sipped his tea. The woman looked at him so solemnly, so coldly. In all the world Ezra could not have found a wife so unlike his mother Rachael.

Ezra himself was different, Noah decided when he had been there a very few hours. When they had left Greenbush, Ezra was a raw-boned, irresponsible youth. He was fifty now, father and grandfather of a numerous family, a school trustee, and a man of standing in the community. Once Ezra had executed Noah's orders, but now . . . well, it might be different.

Even Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who had visited their grandfather when Levi "kept school" at Greenbush, had changed. They talked to Noah politely enough, but it was evident that they had no time to waste on him. They were not children now. If Noah wanted to hunt the eggs, he would have to do it alone.

In the evening Noah tramped back to the hill in the hayfield to visit again the sacred mound which marked the last resting-place of his loved Rachael. That, at least, would be the same. Her grave, like his memories of her, would be always green. But when he had hobbled over to the sacred spot, he found only a rectangular plot of long, dank, dead weeds. The stone he had carved with so much care was lying on its face, broken from side to side. Not a word of the inscription could he read. Poor Noah! He fell

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upon his knees and sobbed out his disappointment. "Rachael! Ach, Rachael!"

On Sunday Ezra got out his "dachweggli" to join the long procession of quaint vehicles that were wending their way to the meeting-house. There was no room for Noah, so he drove in his top-buggy, alone. The little children wanted to go with him, but Salome would not hear of it.

It was the same old meeting-house, without so much as a fresh coat of paint, the same long pulpit, the same tiers of elevated benches, the same stove and water-pail. Yet, somehow, Noah seemed a stranger in a strange land. There were those who came to shake hands with him, but they looked at him coldly. The preachers ignored him entirely. They did not recognize him as their bishop, since they had one of their own. A revival had come to Greenbush, too, but not one of the radical type that had visited Ebytown. Theirs was one of ultra-conservatism, an utter renunciation of the follies of this life, and a turning again to the plain, simple faith and life that their grandfathers had lived and enjoyed.

"They didn't make me feel to home," said Noah to his son, when they had returned from service.

"It was the buggy," Ezra explained. "We don't hold to spring-buggies with falling tops. They are of the world. The devil's wagons, we call them."

"Ach so!" said Noah. It hurt him that they saw in his innocent, unpretentious top-buggy a mark of

GREENBUSH AGAIN

pride, a conformity to the world. Ezra and his friends must be very narrow, he thought.

Noah had been waiting impatiently for the weekly issue of *The Ebytown Announcer*, which he had directed to be sent by mail to his new address. When it came, he lost no time in tearing off the wrapper; and spreading it out on the kitchen table, he began to read.

Salome frowned.

Noah was intent upon the news. He read aloud the most interesting items and added a passing comment. They were making great strides with the new transcontinental railway which was to unite British Columbia and Ontario. That would mean that Manassah would soon be going to Manitoba by a different route. Josiah Ernst had died "with his cancer". And he couldn't go to his funeral! An agitation was on foot to admit girls into the new High School. What next?

"What do we want to know about that?" interjected Salome, with fire in her eyes.

"It's noos," said Noah, apologetically. "I thought you would like to hear it."

Salome tossed a bigoted head. "We want to keep our skirts clear from that wickedness," she said.

Noah sighed. With a heavy heart he folded up his unwanted news, reached for his cane, and went off to his own room.

"He's worse than Sarah yet, with his worldliness," he heard Salome remark to Ezra.

"They're all of them caught in the trap without

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they know it," was Ezra's version of the family wreckage. "When the devil wants to do us something, he don't have to look far for help."

Noah did not respond to the call for supper. When Ezra went to his room to investigate, he found his father's lifeless form bent double over the open newspaper.

THE END

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